OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

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KIRBY'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY

CELEBRATING TWO DECADES OF NINTENDO'S VERSATILE MASCOT



ALSO INSIDE

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BARBARIAN | SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3
JACK TRAMIEL | HAT TRICK | NIGHTS

25 YEARS OF CONTRA

STILL RUNNING AND GUNNING

THE ULTIMATE YEARS

THE UNTOLD STORY ON HOW THE STAMPERS DEFINED 8-BIT GAMING



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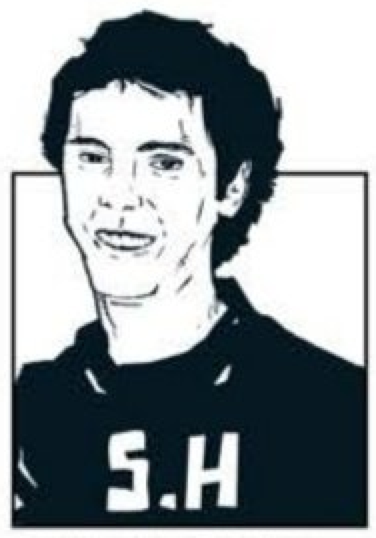
THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE ULTIMATE GAME



DARRAN JONES

Jetpac was fantastic, but it will always be *Sabre Wulf* for me. I wasted far too many hours on that game in my youth and don't regret a single second.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Retro City Rampage
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

Has to be *Jetpac* for me. It's an amazing game that requires a good eye and fast reflexes. A true arcade classic on the humble Speccy.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently Playing:
Resident Evil 6
Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 6



CRAIG GRANNELL

I was always partial to *Pssst*. Perhaps the idea of a robo-gardener appealed when it was time to mow the lawn, or maybe I just liked saying the game's name.
Expertise:
Games that don't require 36 fingers to play
Currently playing:
Enter The Dolphin (iPad)
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



JASON KELK

Jetpac on the Vic-20 is fast and shooty enough to pass as an early Eighties coin-op, apart from the chunkier graphics.
Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Delta (C64)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



PAUL DAVIES

Sabre Wulf, easily. At the time this felt like *Zelda*.
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Halo Reach
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



PAUL DRURY

Jetpac on the Spectrum was a revelation and almost made me doubt my Commodore direction. When it landed on the Vic-20 all was well with the world again.
Expertise:
Lost Megagames
Currently playing:
LittleBigPlanet (Vita)
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



RICHARD BURTON

Atic Atac. OK, a bit easy to complete but its fast pace, colour-coded doors, secret passages and a roast chicken as an energy meter sway it for me.
Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming
Currently playing:
Lollipop Chainsaw
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



MARTYN CARROLL

When I was a kid it was probably *Tranz-Am*, 'cause of the cars, but the one I've played the most over the years is the brilliant *Atic Atac*.
Expertise:
Spectrum stuff
Currently Playing:
Resident Evil 6
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

LOADING...



One of the things I love about a good Retro Gamer cover is that it can transport you back in time. This month's cover is one of my favourites for a very long time, probably because the games featured on it had such a big impact on my life.

I absolutely adored the games of Ultimate and would play them religiously every chance I got. This was particularly tough being an Amstrad owner (the conversions weren't always great) but I always found a way to get my fix on games like *Trans Am* and *Sabre Wulf*.

My best friend Paul Elkins owned a Spectrum, so I would regularly make the ten-minute trek to his house in order to play the latest Ultimate game, which he always even had. Even better was the fact that my next door neighbour Martin Vincent had a Spectrum as well, and I was able to play on it whenever my mum was out.

Every night when I turned the corner into my road I would pray that Mum was out, so that I could pop on *Sabre Wulf* (even Martin's mum was obsessed with it) for a quick game. I'd get quite upset when I found out Mum was actually home.

I'm clearly not the only person with fond memories of these classic games, as a number of Rare developers loved those classic 8-bit games so much they moved to the company. You'll find their stories inside, along with many others.

Enjoy the magazine,



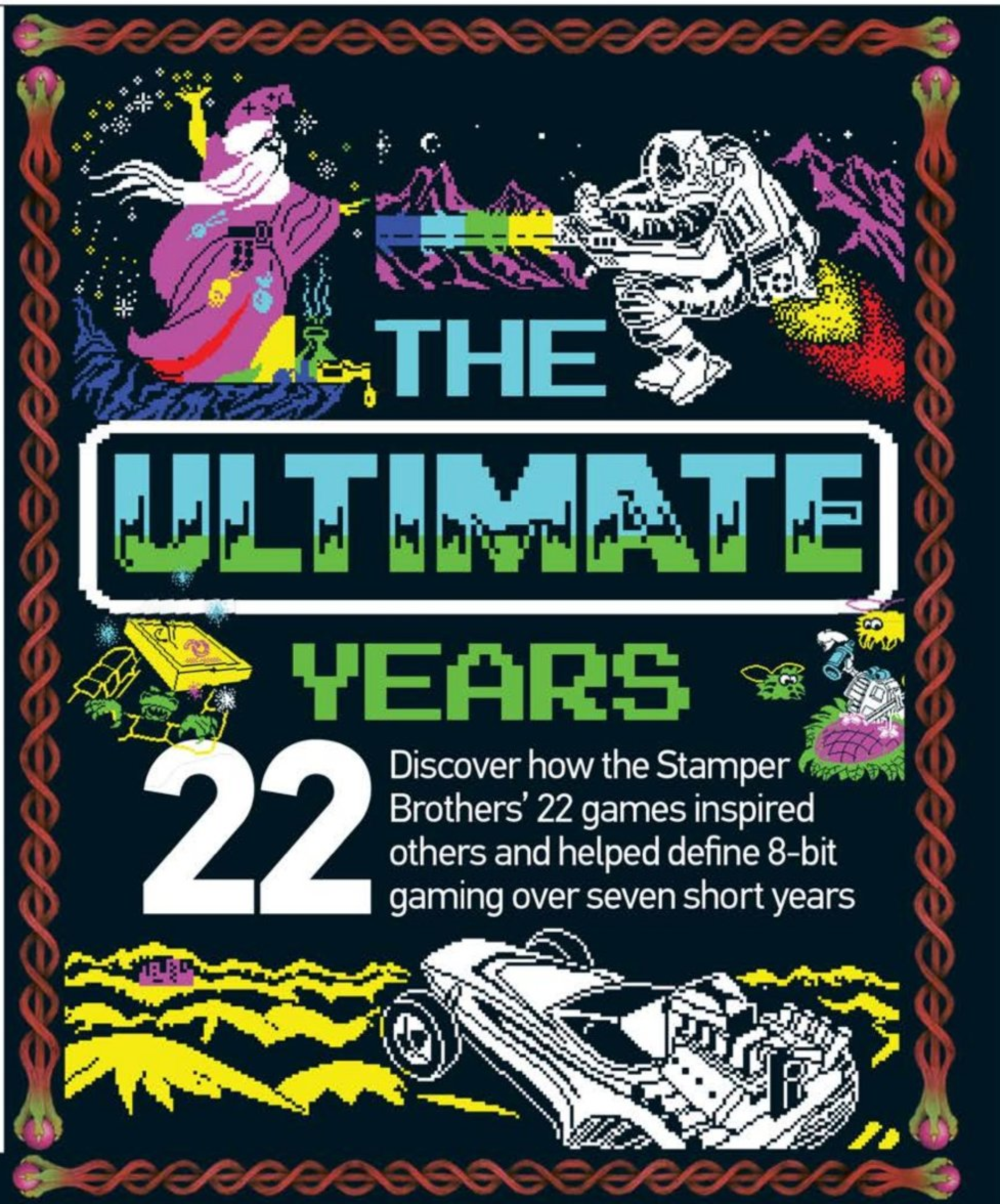


CONTENTS

>> Load 109 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

RETRO REVIVALS



22 Discover how the Stamper Brothers' 22 games inspired others and helped define 8-bit gaming over seven short years

In the hot seat this month…





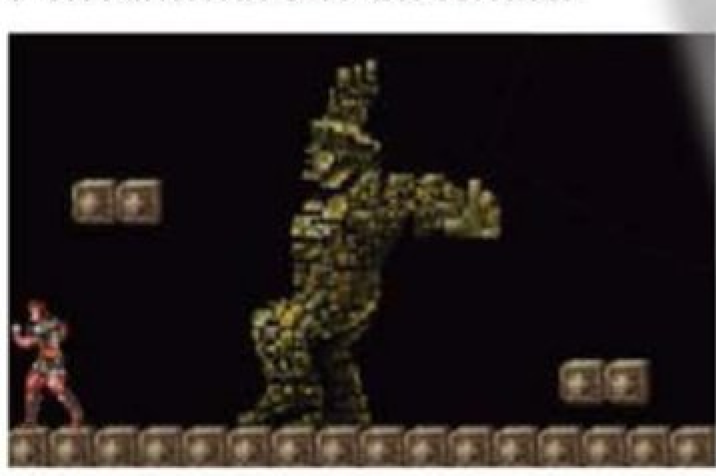




"It represents a new brand of storytelling" Samuel Roberts









retroGAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL







ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED











>> This month sees us visiting two retro events that happened recently. The sadder news is the unexpected passing away of industry legend Mike Singleton, which caught us all by surprise. Needless to say we're working on a proper tribute for him next issue

CONTENTS



PLAY EXPO 2012

WE REPORT ON THIS YEAR'S BIGGEST RETRO EVENT



Gordon Sinclair and Dave Moore Brown have come a long way since setting up their first retro event. After seeing the positive impact of previous events such as Chris Wilkins' Retro Fusion and Mat Corne's Byte Back, they decided to host their own event in Huddersfield called Retro Reunited in 2009.

Three years later and their event has transformed into a juggernaut of a show that combines gaming both past and present. Their first big event after Retro Reunited was called R3PLAY and took place in November 2010 at Blackpool's seafront. Replay 2011 saw that year's event happening at the same venue (on a larger scale) but it was becoming obvious that Blackpool would not be big enough.

It was hardly surprising then when a new name and venue was revealed earlier this year. The newly termed Play Expo 2012 took place at Manchester's Event City and proved to be the biggest production yet, easily eclipsing last year's effort. "Over 8,000 people came to Play, more than double any of our previous shows," co-director Gordon Sinclair proudly told us. An impressive figure, but not as impressive as the show floor's layout.

Microsoft, Konami, Nintendo, Namco, Electronic Arts and Activision were just a few big publishers at the event, all showcasing big incoming games ranging from *DmC: Devil May Cry* and *Metal Gear Rising*, to *Halo 4* and *Need For Speed: Most Wanted*. Nintendo's Wii U was another big highlight, with people often content to queue for over an hour in order to play Nintendo's new console.

It was the retro side of the show that we were interested in, though, and Play didn't disappoint. There was a great amount of pinball tables and arcade machines on offer, with people happily queuing in order to get a go on their favourite game from yesteryear. It's worth noting the general patience and kindness of other gamers, and any cabinets that did break down quickly got replaced or fixed. Another nice touch was how Konami and Namco had celebration zones, allowing you to play all the *Metal Gear* and *Tekken* games across a variety of systems.

Computers and consoles were also in abundance, and there was another



There were some cracking miniature cabinets at the event.



The celebration zone for *Metal Gear* featured every game in the series.

strong mix of rare and common machines, ensuring people had plenty of choice. We spotted rare Ataris, a Famicom system, an Amstrad CPC playing *Solomon's Key* and all sorts of cool stuff. There weren't as many rare cartridges on display, but this was completely understandable when you consider the size of this year's event.

And if we're honest that's the only real problem that we had with it. Its sheer scale meant that it felt a little impersonal compared to previous shows. There were a few technical issues, which also put a dampener on the weekend, as a number of interesting talks with the likes of Jeff Minter, the Pickford Brothers and Mike Montgomery of The Bitmap Brothers cancelled on the Saturday.

"Unfortunately we had issues with the supplier who provided our audio/visual services," continues Gordon, about the small blemish on an otherwise spotless weekend. "They were late in setting up a number of areas meaning that for health and safety reasons we had to delay opening. Added to this was the phenomenal number of people who turned up before opening time. We expected a number of people to attend on Saturday; we just didn't expect them to be queuing from 10.30am."



» The new games section was extremely popular, with *Halo 4* and *Call Of Duty* deathmatches.

Queue up they did, and while the opening was delayed, it was certainly worth the wait, especially as the event itself ended up extending its doors past the original date until 9pm that evening. The thing that has always impressed us with these events is that they're put together by a small amount of people, and quite a few dedicated followers from various retro forums, including **Retro Gamer**. This year was no different and while it's obvious that the show is getting more and more commercial with each passing year, it's also clear that the team hasn't lost its roots in regard to what made the events so enjoyable in the first place.

"We have learned a huge amount and will spend the weeks following the show reviewing each area of the event and all the feedback," finishes Gordon. "We were disappointed by the opening delay and queuing issues and worked hard to ensure that they did not happen on Sunday (on Sunday the queue was cleared in 13 minutes). We will put plans and contingency plans in place to make sure we are prepared for the huge demand next year."

> **"While the show is getting more commercial, it's clear the team hasn't lost its roots"**

Highlights

Pinball

There were an impressive number of pinball tables on display courtesy of Northern Lights Pinball. Most of the tables were kindly on loan from private owners and they covered tables from all eras. We were pleased to play *The Twilight Zone* and *Indiana Jones* tables, but there were a boggling number on display including, *Judge Dredd*, *Bride Of Pin*Bot*, *The Addams Family*, *Fish Tales*, *Pin*Bot*, *Spirit*, *Joker Poker* and *No Good Gophers*. Darran was even planning to buy one, but chickened out at the last minute when his wife turned up.



Celebrities

It's always nice to meet developers you've interviewed over the phone; it's even nicer to see them seeing other people enjoying their classic games. While logistics (and the lack of an opening line) meant we missed the Pickford Bros and Simon Butler, we were able to share a few words with the likes of Mike Montgomery, Bill Harbison, who was enjoying the event with his family, Jeff Minter and Jim Bagley. It was especially nice to catch up with artist Bob Wakelin and thank him for the fantastic art work he's let us use over the past year.



Cosplay

While there was some cosplay at previous shows, it didn't compare with the scale of this year. Some of it was stunning and we can only imagine the amount of work that went into them. We saw a couple of Dans (one of them forum member DPrinny) Ryu and Ken, lots of *BlazBlue* girls, some amazing looking Ghostbusters, the lead from *Lollipop Chainsaw*, and numerous *Final Fantasy* heroes. By far the best though was the brave soul who went as King Hippo. He didn't win, but he got a deserved round of applause when he went up on stage.



>> Forum members tell us about their weekend

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

jdanddiet
I thought it was great. I was volunteering and was assigned to the re.play section and got such a buzz watching young and old playing on all the retro systems. In the request zone we had a 30-something guy completing *Sonic 2* on the Mega Drive whilst a lad next to him played on a NES for the first time.

psj3809
I say it every time, but I need to spend more time on the old consoles! I spend too much time nattering or finding people! The machines/pinball tables that I did play I really did like.

Mootown
I was stuck on the Nintendo stand most of the day so didn't get much time to actually play, but the arcade sections were immense. I was especially excited to see the newest *Dodonpachi* (*DoDonPachi SaiDaiOuJou*) running just opposite the entrance to our stand. I spoke to one of the chaps who had brought the games and apparently the board had cost over £1,000.

The Laird
I voted for just right, I am with the people who have said it was perfect the way they had separated it into sections. I hardly played any games, as I was too busy catching up with old friends and having a laugh. It lacked the personality of other events I go to and it was too easy to lose people but there was enough there to make it more than worthwhile attending.

mainvein
I thought it was a great success (bar some technical hitches), there was easily loads more retro than last time, a great selection of pinball and arcade machines, some great stalls, always entertaining seeing the cosplay people (King Hippo especially). I suppose the only gripes were that the modern section all seemed a bit too secretive and impersonal for some reason, was there really a need to have high walls to protect people from looking into the new games on show? And was there really need for kids on *COD* to swear so much?

FORUM OPINION

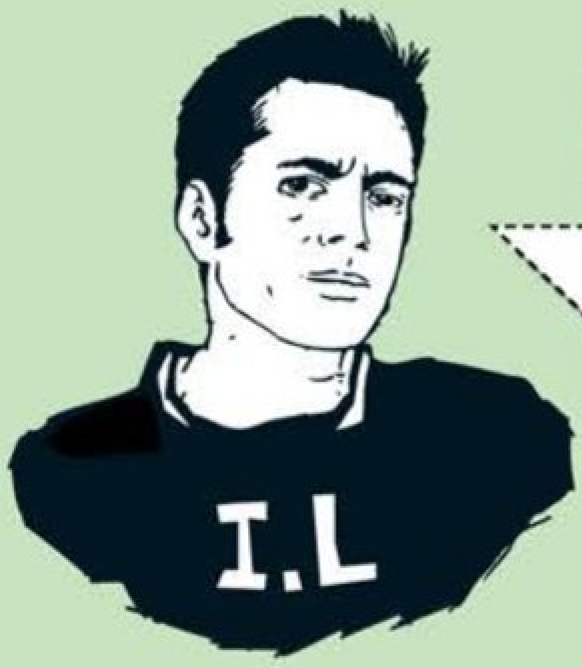
What did you think of this year's event?



retrocolumns

RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Tape Decks

I pity kids these days, I really do. What chance have they got of surviving? They have no skills at all. Show someone under the age of 25 a cassette and a pencil and ask them what the connection is, they'll probably end up smoking one and shoving the other up their arse. That's how stupid kids are today.

We, of course, know that you would insert the pencil into the hole of the tape and use it to tighten it up if the spool had got a bit loose, or to rewind it if the rewind button on your tape deck had broken and you were too thick to realise that you could just turn the tape over and fast forward it. This actually happened to a friend of mine. No names, no pack drill, but he was a total plum.

Tape decks were integral in the Eighties. It's how I consumed most of my music. I bought records, but would immediately tape them and never touch the vinyl again. Getting the Dubly levels just right was an art form. I actually liked the meter to peak a bit, seemed to give the songs a bit more oomph; although Roxette and the other pap I was recording never had much of that to start with.

When it came to loading games though, it was a different thing all together. Your top of the range bits of kit weren't necessarily the best ones for a bit of Yie Ar. It often paid to go a bit low rent.

My tape deck of choice was my brown WHSmith own brand. I know; as I typed that I just realised how mental it was. Smiths *made* their own electrical equipment. Now they can barely make a profit, but for me, that chunky piece of gear was the best you could get. It had volume and I think a tone. This meant that you could fiddle with things ever so slightly if you were having trouble loading up *Strykers Run*. In fact, I always had problems with that bloody game. There were two points in the tape when I had to press the play button down really hard to get it to work.

I also had a sneaky back up. This was a rubbish Boots own brand Walkman. It was awful. It played at the wrong speed and chewed tapes up but sometimes it would perform magic on a game that wouldn't load any other way. Using this was a real last resort, and to give it the best chance I had the optimum volume level marked out with Tipp-ex. If it was a fraction out, no joy.

I seem to remember the BBC having a beast of a tape deck, and the C64 was pretty impressive as well. We will ignore the Spectrum +2 because, while it was a great computer, the player always felt a bit on the flimsy side to me – but please don't attack me, fans, I am exhausted this month.

Let's just wallow in the contented knowledge that should push come to shove, we could totally rewind a tape with just a pencil – and that makes us very special indeed.

I bought records, but I would tape them and never touch the vinyl again



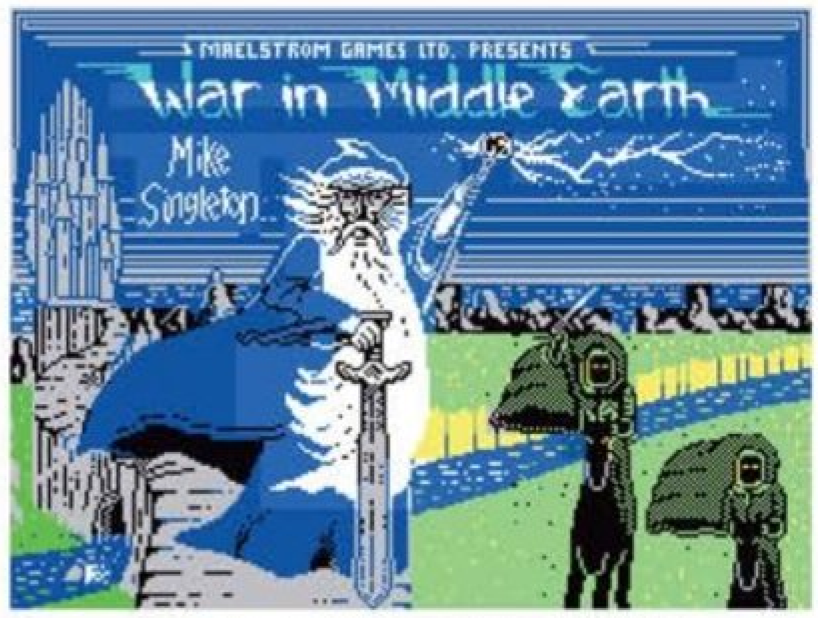
MIKE SINGLETON 1951 – 2012

THE LORD OF MIDNIGHT SLEEPS

Just as we were going to press we were hit with the sad news that gaming veteran Mike Singleton had recently passed away. He came to the attention of 8-bit gamers thanks to epic adventures like *The Lords Of Midnight*, *Doomdark's Revenge*, *Dark Sceptre* and *War In Middle Earth* and quickly became known for pushing technology to the limits in order to convey his elaborate in-depth visions.

He continued to push boundaries with the 16-bit generation, thanks to classic titles like *Midwinter*, which pushed 3D technology to its limits and delivered a unique gaming experience for its time. Mike continued to work on games in the 32-bit generation and beyond, and worked for big companies such as Midway, LucasArts and Codemasters. He was involved in *Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb*, *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* and *Race Driver: Grid*. He was recently working on remakes of his *The Lord Of Midnight* games with his friend and fellow coder Christopher Jon Wild who wrote on his blog: "Tonight has shaken me in a way that I would never have expected. I already badly miss my friend."

Mike had been battling jaw cancer, which had been discovered shortly after his 60th birthday. He was given the all clear, but died of natural causes on 10 October in Switzerland at the age of 61. A tribute to his fantastic games will be in **Retro Gamer**'s next issue.



» [Spectrum] Mike was a big fan of JRR Tolkien.



» [Spectrum] *The Lords Of Midnight*'s impact was huge.

SPECTRUM30 SHOW REPORT

IN SEPTEMBER, A FITTING CELEBRATION WAS HELD IN SINCLAIR'S HOMETOWN FOR THE SPECCY'S THIRTIETH. MARTYN CARROLL WAS THERE FOR SOME RUBBER LOVIN'

"We bought it to help with your homework," sang MJ Hibbett as he opened this event with a performance of his Spectrum ode, *Hey Hey 16K*. "And the household accounts, if your dad ever works it all out."

Organiser Thomas Eberle reveals that around 150 people attended over the two days, which took place at the Cambridge campus of Anglia Ruskin University. A decent crowd for a single-format show. The show itself was split into four main rooms. There was a lecture theatre for the various talks, a room reserved for the new four-player LAN game *Spec-Tank*, and an area where attendees could set up their own kit. Finally, there was the return of the ZX Microfair where exhibitors and sellers gathered.

Crowds in the Microfair room did diminish when the talks took place, and it emptied out when, late on Saturday afternoon, a misty-eyed tour of the old Sinclair building was organised. Sunday was quieter, though not exactly low-tempo as a live coding competition took place. "I really enjoyed that," says Thomas. "I wasn't expecting so many good programs to be made in just a few hours. We will release a compilation of the programs soon."

So what next? Will Thomas return in ten years and stage a Spectrum40 show? Something may happen sooner. "In the end the Spectrum show was a big success," he says. "We are in talks for a similar 30 year celebration of the QL [in 2014]. And of course we'd invite the QL's relatives, like the ZX81 and Spectrum, as well."



» The ZX Microfair room was nice and busy, particularly on the Saturday.

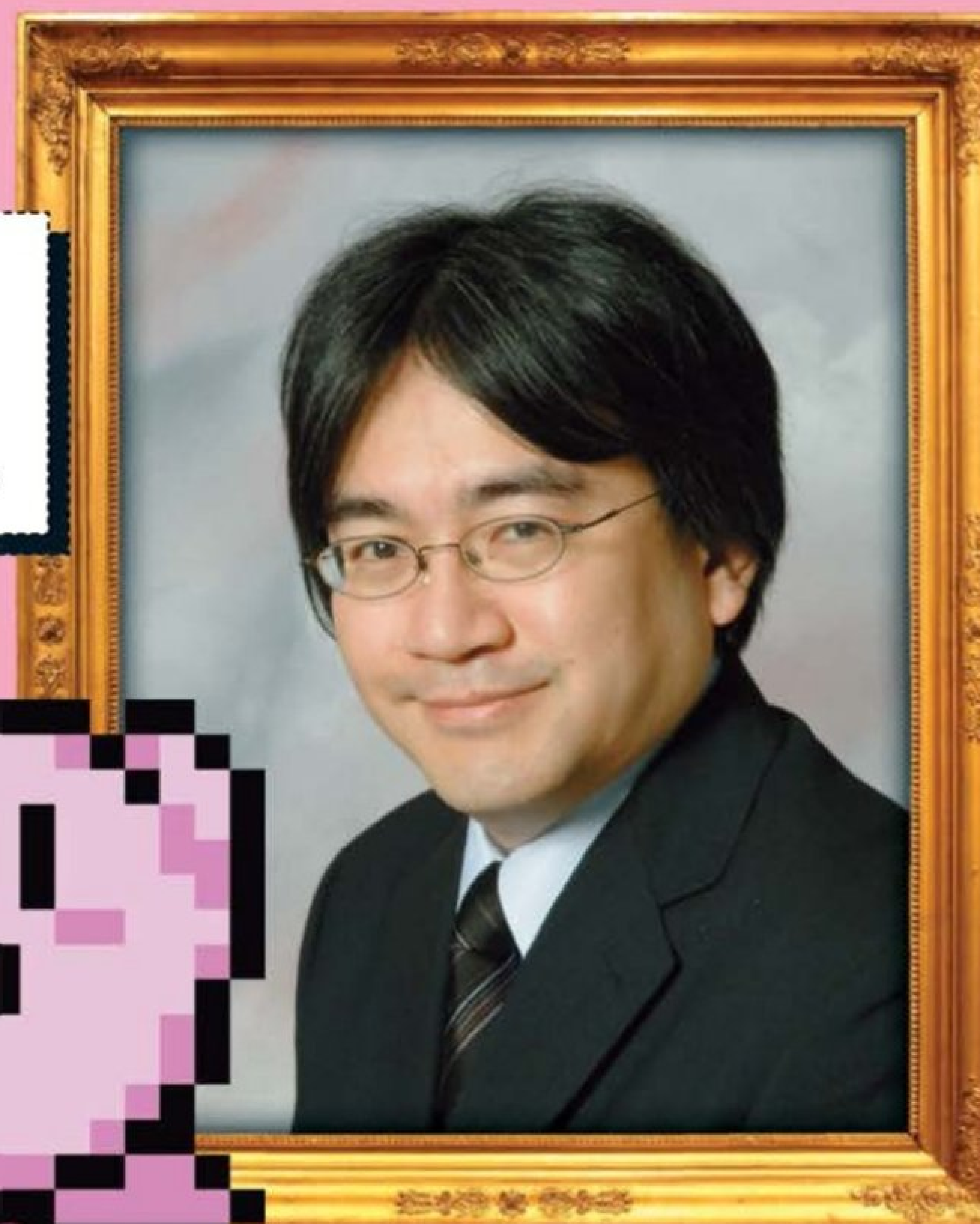
retrocolumns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



Whole Iwata Love



Like the ancient power in *The Legend of Zelda*, Nintendo's style is a Triforce of sorts, in which president Satoru Iwata brings a very powerful element from his days at HAL Laboratory.

This issue has a special feature on Kirby, the bubblegum-pink Nintendo mascot famed for his ability to become what he eats. You could say that, since his Game Boy debut in 1992 with *Kirby's Dreamland*, the little guy's charm has permeated Nintendo. Pre-Kirby, Nintendo was 'AWESOME!!!' Since Kirby, it's been more like 'Awwww… bless.'

My haphazard theory is that through Gunpei Yokoi (*Kid Icarus, Metroid*), Shigeru Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka (*Mario, Zelda*), and Satoru Iwata (*Kirby, Earthbound*), we see all sides of Nintendo. There's a polite seriousness, a spirit of adventure and an unabashed love for the silly that gives Nintendo its reputation. After the departure of Hiroshi Yamauchi in 2002, the role of mastermind passes to the twinkly-eyed Satoru Iwata.

As you might know, as retro enthusiast and therefore respectful of Nintendo through the years, unlikely superstar Kirby and psychedelic RPG *Earthbound* hail from external studio HAL Laboratory. HAL games have this certain charm, as avant-garde as *Treasure* (*Guardian Heroes, Radiant Silvergun*) but much more family-friendly. After leaving his post as president of HAL in 2000 to join Nintendo, and even since becoming president of Nintendo in 2002, apparently Mr Iwata still enjoys some creative responsibility at HAL, most notably of all regarding Kirby's adventures.

When I reviewed *Kirby's Dreamland* in 1992 for the official *Nintendo Magazine* (I think I awarded it 92%) I didn't care where it came from; I only knew that this little guy made me grin from ear to ear with his very musical routines. Kirby has so much heart and is so joyful, elements that also define the heroes in *Earthbound*, that when I eventually clapped eyes on the man responsible for the 'HAL effect' I wasn't in the least surprised. I once heard Shigeru Miyamoto remind an over-enthusiastic journalist that Nintendo was about making money first and foremost, it wasn't all about fulfilling personal dreams. What seems to be the case from where I'm sitting is that Mr Iwata enjoys keeping sight of the affection that breathes such warmth and mischievous direction into Nintendo's sails.

The *Kirby* series was designed by *Smash Bros*' genius Masahiro Sakurai at HAL under Mr Iwata's tenure, and it's my view that this leadership enables Nintendo staff to reach so fearlessly with such compassion. I'm not sure if the comparison has ever been made, or if it's entirely appropriate, but to me Satoru Iwata is a real-life Willy Wonka in charge of this factory of untold delights.

With Wii U on the approach, I am for the first time unsure about whether the magic is still there or if it has been sadly usurped by cold-hearted science. Has one of Nintendo's brightest stars turned supernova and is the whole show about to implode? This really is troubling me, probably more than it should. But if I have faith in that famously assured smile and the proof of past successes, the wholesome hallmarks of HAL Laboratory as embodied by Nintendo president Satoru Iwata might just be enough to pull me through.

This little guy made me grin from ear to ear… Kirby has so much heart and is so joyful


» Richard Oakes first came to fame when he was plucked from obscurity at the age of 17 to become Suede's new guitarist.

*A MOMENT WITH...
Artmagic

This month we went off the traditional beaten track to talk to Richard Oakes and Sean McGhee, the duo behind music project Artmagic

Who are Artmagic?

Artmagic is a new project from Richard Oakes, the lead guitarist of Suede and producer and vocalist Sean McGhee, who has been involved with the likes of Robyn and Imogen Heap. They were only too keen to tell us about their love of music and the Amstrad CPC.

What were the first computers you owned?
Sean McGhee: A Commodore 16, then a ZX Spectrum. Neither exactly music-friendly machines! I used to marvel at what could be squeezed out of the Speccy's beeper, though. (David Whittaker's *ATV*, anyone?)
Richard Oakes: It was an Amstrad CPC464. My dad bought it and used to put simple programs and games into it. In fact we all used to tinker with programming, but really we used it for the cassette games, some of which are still great.

So what would you say is your favourite game then?
SM: *Bomberman* on the PC Engine, ideally with five players. The single-player mode is quite dull, but [you] just add friends to achieve the perfect storm of simplicity, depth, and swearing…
RO: I used to love the *Dizzy* games on the Amstrad, plus the *Manic Miner* ones. But once the PlayStation came along, my firm favourite was the *Resident Evil* series. I became mildly obsessed with them during a long, frustrating recording session in 1998. Probably the only time I've ever used gaming to escape reality!

What's the best piece of music you've ever heard in a videogame?
SM: I've got a weird soft spot for the prog jazz stylings in *Border Down* on the Dreamcast, but I could listen to the music from Zone A of *Darius Plus* all day. Also *Rockman* on the Commodore 16, for all the wrong reasons.
RO: One that's always stuck with me is the in-game music for *Jet Set Willy*. I'll still be humming that when I'm old and senile! I used to be able to play it on the piano, my sister probably still can. Also the different pieces you hear when playing *Bust-A-Move* on the PSone always make me laugh, they're so buoyant. I'd also like to mention how great the music in *PaRappa The Rapper* was.

How important do you think music is to videogames?
SM: Hugely, although if I'm honest I miss the days when videogame music was limited by the technology that was available. Limitations are good, and chip tunes had a lot of character. The Hans Zimmer wannabes we get now often really don't.
RO: I agree; game music was its own thing back when there was a lot less scope for it. Technology has made it sound the same as everything else.

Have you either been tempted to create music for videogames?
SM: I was hugely amused when I heard Jonathan Coulton's *Still Alive*. It made me wonder if you could tie a suite of songs and a videogame together but avoiding an adolescent car crash of styles that would shame Hideo Kojima. Any takers?
RO: I can't imagine the sort of game that would be appropriate for the music I write… No, I'm primarily a songwriter.

What can you tell us about Artmagic's new single *Down In The River*?
SM: It's a song about being shameless, and being unashamed. Many of our songs are quite melancholy but this song is very deliberately joyful. Big hooks, grinding guitars, throbbing synths, Girls Aloud meets Duran – what's not to love?
RO: It's one of the oldest pieces I gave Sean, I probably wrote the music about ten years ago… But some hooks just stick with you, and Sean managed to resurrect it into our most upbeat song – lyrically and musically.

Thanks to Richard and Sean for their time. You can listen to Down In The River now by visiting www.artmagicmusic.com



» *Down In The River* is the latest single from Artmagic and is available in both physical and digital forms.


» [PSP] Richard is a big fan of the music in *PaRappa The Rapper*, but also enjoys the *Resident Evil* franchise.


» [PC Engine] Sean feels that there's nothing better than a multiplayer game on *Bomberman*. We'd have to agree with him.


» [Dreamcast] We've not met many musicians who would even know what *Border Down* was, let alone quote its awesome soundtrack.

retrodiary

8 November – 6 December

>> A month of retro events both past and present



11 November 1999
■ The first game in the *Medal Of Honor* series is released in the USA on PlayStation.



11 November 2009
■ Nintendo's keenly awaited *New Super Mario Bros Wii* is released, making its first appearance, oddly, in Australia.



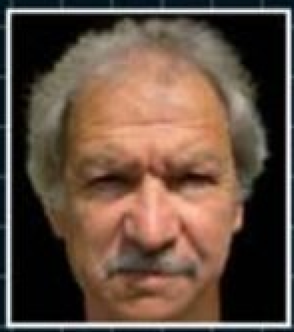
11 November 2012
■ Mario role-playing game, *Paper Mario: Sticker Star*, is pencilled in for release on the Nintendo 3DS.

14 November 2003
■ Europe sees Nintendo release the bright *Mario Kart: Double Dash* exclusively on the GameCube.





21 November 1990
■ *Super Mario World* is released in Japan as the pack-in game for the newly released Super Nintendo console.



19 November 1948
■ Mel Croucher, video games visionary, writer, software developer, founder of Automata and the inventor of the earmuff is born.



18 November 1993
■ The Atari Jaguar console is officially released in the US of A.



14 November 2005
■ Shadow the Hedgehog, Sega's anti-Sonic character, gets his own game on PlayStation 2.



21 November 1994
■ Rare and Nintendo release the first instalment in their *Donkey Kong Country* series for the SNES.



21 November 2000
■ Treasure and Nintendo release the Asia-exclusive scrolling shooter *Sin & Punishment* on Nintendo 64.



21 November 2003
■ Activision's *Tony Hawk's Underground* skateboarding game is released in Europe on the PlayStation 2 and GameCube.



23 November 2001
■ Game Park release its first handheld, the GP32, available exclusively in South Korea.



30 November 2001
■ First-person shooter game *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is released on PC in Europe.



29 November 2002
■ *Spyro: Enter The Dragonfly* is released in the UK on PlayStation 2 and GameCube.



29 November 1972
■ Designed by Allan Alcorn and published by Atari, *Pong* is released as an arcade game.



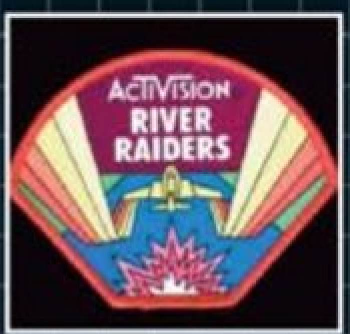
26 November 1980
■ Atari's vector graphics coin-op game *Battlezone* is released in arcades.



30 November 2001
The first title in the classic first-person shooter series *Half-Life* is released on PlayStation 2.



30 November 2012
■ Nintendo's next generation of Wii console, the Wii U, is set for release in the UK.



1 December 1982
■ Activision's *River Raiders* is released on the Atari 2600.



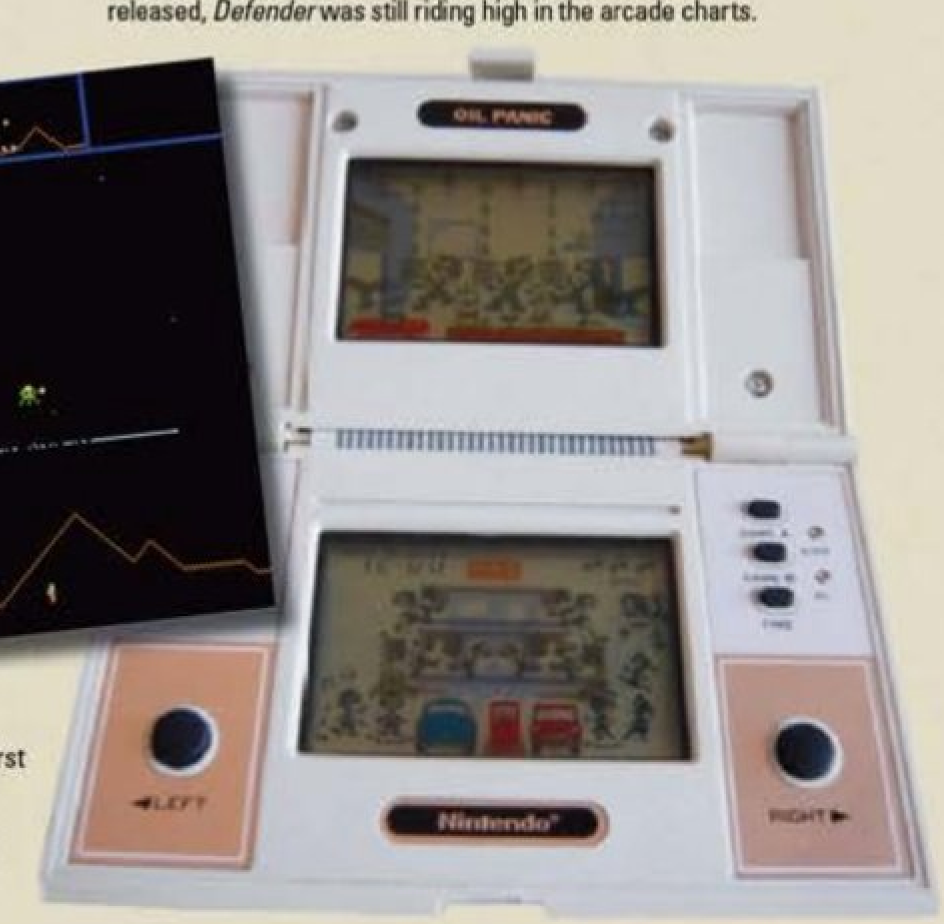
6 December 2012
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES





» [Arcade] While Namco's *Pole Position* had just been released, *Defender* was still riding high in the arcade charts.



» [Game & Watch] *Oil Panic* was the first of the dual screen handheld Game & Watch games. Any likeness to the DS is deliberate.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1982

MAY 1982
New magazines, Commodore has VIC hardware heaven and hell, Electron has no Christmas charge, Namco is in Pole Position while Williams goes on Moon Patrol and Nintendo suffers an Oil Panic. Richard Burton gets crude...

New magazine of the month was *Which Micro & Software Review*, published by EMAP. With no console coverage and little in the way of gaming news, the boast on the cover of twenty pages of new reviews didn't let on that these were mostly hardware.

If reviews of luggable computers, the "portable" machines that were more likely to promote the sort of muscle growth that no anabolic steroid could touch, were your thing then you were in luck. Amid technical specifications of a Research Machines 380Z and the Osborne 1 there were some gems such as a review of the new BBC Micro. Despite the dour start, *Which Micro* grew into an informative and, thankfully, more games-based read.

Another new addition to the magazine world, although not hitting any newsstands was *Atari Age*. Published by The Atari Club Inc, a subsidiary of Atari, and distributed exclusively to American members of the Atari Club, it was a colourful bi-monthly read which lasted just eleven issues.

After the recent Hanover Computer Fair that Commodore had attended, it revealed that it had two new computers under development for release before the end of the year; the VIC-10 and VIC-40. The VIC-10, renamed the VC-10 in Germany, Ultimax in America and Commodore Max Machine in Japan, was in essence a very cut-down version of the Commodore 64 and designed to be used more as a games console than a home computer. It had minimal expandability with ports available for only RF, cartridge, cassette and joystick and a horrid membrane keyboard in the style of the Atari 400.

Commodore proposed a £110 price tag for the UK release with a name as yet unspecified. With details of the system having been released days before the ZX Spectrum's launch, it was surprising to hear that within three weeks of that announcement that Commodore had abandoned the UK release. Was it in reaction to the Spectrum or the realisation that the micro wasn't really up to much?



» Despite looking like a potential 8-bit winner, a manufacturing delay lost the Electron early sales.

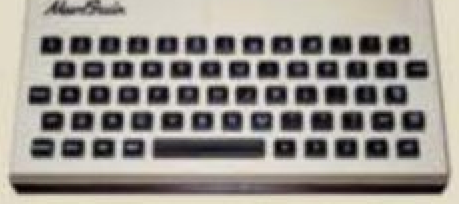
Nobody knew for sure although the Ultimax proved to be such a flop across other territories that it was discontinued within months of release, though the VIC-40 was a different matter entirely. Designed to supersede the VIC-20, it was due to be released in August. It was renamed the Commodore 64 and became the best-selling home computer ever. The recently released ZX Spectrum had just found its main competitor.

Acorn had hopes of being the Spectrum's main challenger with news that it was planning to release a new micro called the Acorn Electron in the autumn with an eye on capturing the Christmas market with its sub-£150 machine. With its 32K of RAM and ROM and professional-feel keyboard, hopes were high of contesting Sinclair's new rubbery offering. Alas, manufacturing problems ensured that orders couldn't be filled until after the New Year, causing Acorn to miss the lucrative Christmas market, which proved to be a mistake that the Electron would never really recover from.

The last new offering, and easily the least useful, was the NewBrain from Grundy Business Systems. The entry-level basic model was £199 and Grundy labelled the NewBrain as being "designed for business, scientific and educational applications, as well as for home use". This home use afterthought summed it up. We racked our brains for a realistic home use for a NewBrain and could only think of using it as a doorstop.

ZX81 owners who were feeling left out in the cold with its new big brother hogging

all the colour-clashed limelight needn't have felt neglected as Sinclair released a host of new titles for the computer; *Chess*, *Backgammon*, *Vu-Calc*, *Vu-File* and *Flight Simulation*.



» The Grundy NewBrain, so-called as you needed a brain transplant to buy one.

All were developed by Psion and all would be quickly converted to the Spectrum and produced in vast quantities. All would also become prevalent eBay filler in Spectrum games auctions and would eventually become the only Spectrum games you'd ever see at a carboot sale bar *Scrabble* and *Make A Chip*.

Two new arcade games were announced for imminent release; Namco unveiled *Pole Position* and Irem/Williams Electronics spoke about *Moon Patrol*. *Moon Patrol* saw you take control of a moon buggy that had to negotiate a crater-stricken moon surface to reach checkpoints. Jumping over the craters isn't quite as easy as it sounds when there are boulders strategically placed in your way and UFOs shooting at you from above. Luckily you have upward and forward-facing guns to dispose of both. *Moon Patrol* was a fun and fast moving game, which is often cited as having the first instance of parallax scrolling in a side-scrolling videogame.

Namco's *Pole Position* was a more conventional racing game with a Formula 1 background. *Pole Position* also had a couple of videogaming firsts to its name. It was the first racing game which required the player to complete a time trial lap before qualifying for the main event, and was also the first game to feature a circuit based on an actual real-life racing track (the Fuji Speedway circuit in Oyama, Japan sports fans). These aspects of driving games are still key to the genre.

Both games were big hits but *Pole Position* particularly grabbed the public's attention and became one of the biggest grossing arcade games of the year. *Moon Patrol* eventually appeared in June, with *Pole Position* emerging a month later.

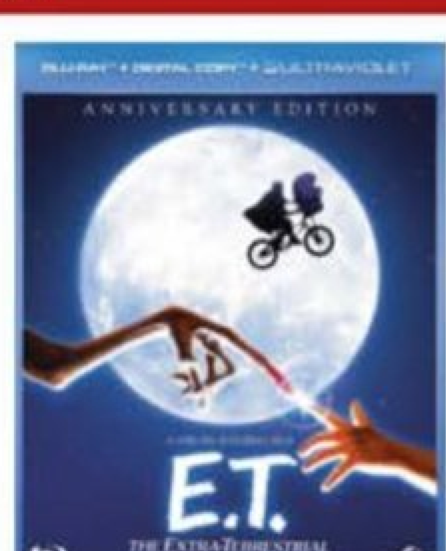
Nintendo released its latest Game & Watch game, the first to feature a dual screen. In *Oil Panic* you had to catch oil droplets leaking from a pipe. Once full, you dumped the contents into an oil drum and missing an oil drop loses you a life. Once again, simple gaming won out, and the seeds were sown for the inspiration behind the future design of the Nintendo DS.



» Please be upstanding for the biggest selling home computer of all time – the VIC-40.

MAY 1982 NEWS

The Falklands War between the UK and Argentina continued with several ships being sunk during May. 2 May saw the nuclear submarine HMS Conqueror sink the Argentine cruiser, the General Belgrano with the loss of 323 lives. 4 May saw Argentina retaliate with an air attack on HMS Sheffield. 20 British sailors died and the ship finally sank on 10 May.



22 May saw the Royal Navy frigate HMS Ardent sunk with the loss of 20 lives. A day later HMS Antelope was hit in air attacks and sank after exploding on the 23 May. A further 22 sailors were killed in the event.

26 May saw the world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival of *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*. Steven Spielberg's movie tells the story of Elliott, a young lad who finds an alien that he befriends. He attempts to keep him secret while devising a way of sending his glowy-fingered friend home. Other films of note shown at Cannes in May 1982 include *Chronopolis* and *Creepshow*.

13 May saw the animated television series *The Mysterious Cities Of Gold* make its debut. It's 1532 and Esteban, a Spanish boy, voyages to the New World to try and find his father. En route he encounters an Inca girl called Zia, who is also looking for her father, and Tao, who is looking for any remaining members of his race. The three are aided by their Spanish navigator friend Mendoza. All three of their quests become intertwined and point towards discovering the seven Cities of Gold...

THIS MONTH IN...

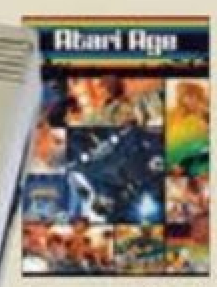
POPULAR COMPUTING WEEKLY



Being a weekly magazine had its benefits as *PCW* managed to knock out the first review of the new ZX Spectrum. Conclusion? "Great value for money and will prove a great success". Fair enough. However, they also thought that the as of yet unseen microdrive peripheral was a "sensation".



ATARI AGE



The Atari Club magazine revealed news that a new console was under development and due out for autumn. The 5200 would have better graphics, sound and a controller which would combine a joystick, paddle and keyboard into one unit. The wrist-breakingly stiff joystick of the 2600 was no more. Hurrah!



ELECTRONIC GAMES



EG and Midway had noticed a distinct increase in female arcade gamers and thought this boom could be due to non-violent games such as *Centipede* and the massively successful *Pac-Man*. A Midway spokesperson commented that as a debt to lady arcaders it would be releasing *Ms. Pac-Man*.



CHARTS

MAY 1982



ARCADE

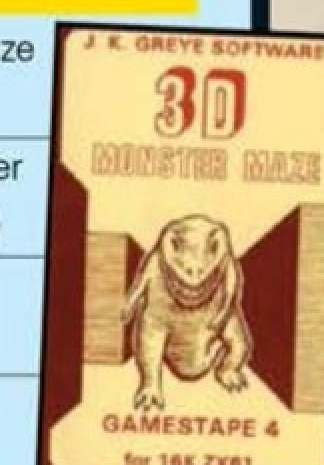
1 Pac-Man (Namco/Midway)
2 Asteroids (Atari)
3 Defender (Williams)
4 Centipede (Atari)
5 Space Invaders (Taito/Midway)

ATARI 2600



1 Pixels At War (Atari)
2 Pac-Man (Atari)
3 Kaboom! (Activision)
4 Missile Command (Atari)
5 Adventure (Atari)

ZX81



1 3D Monster Maze (JK Greye)
2 Football Manager (Addictive Games)
3 ZX Chess (Artic Games)
4 Galaxians (Artic Games)
5 Dictator (Bug-Byte)

MUSIC

1 A Little Peace (Nicole Wonder)
2 House Of Fun (Madness)
3 Ebony & Ivory (Paul McCartney & Stevie Wonder)
4 Only You (Yazoo)
5 I Won't Let You Down (PhD)



BACK TO THE NINETIES



CHARTS

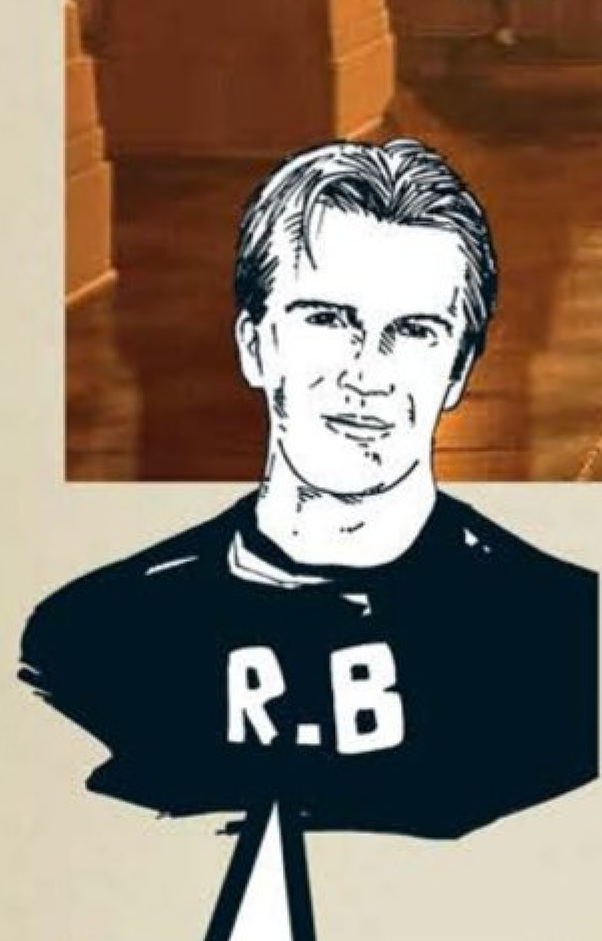
AUGUST 1995



PC	
1	Ultimate Soccer Manager (Impressions)
2	Magic Carpet (Electronic Arts)
3	Premier Manager 3 (Gremlin Interactive)
4	Sim Tower (Maxis)
5	Flight Of The Amazon Queen (Renegade)



» [PC] It took a while to arrive but when it did the point-and-click adventure that was *Blade Runner* was beautiful and engaging.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1995

AUGUST 1995 Psygnosis wipes out the opposition, Mario World 2 excites, Cool Spot's return doesn't, Bomberman 3 is a blast, Virtual Boy Water World stinks and sinks while Blade Runner is belatedly great. Richard Burton dreams of electric sheep

With Sony's PlayStation but a month away from its official UK release, games developers were on stand by with their launch titles. One of the most impressive was the futuristic *WipEout* from Psygnosis.

Psygnosis had invested a lot of time in perfecting *WipEout*, not least in employing a design company, The Designers Republic, to create stylised packaging, iconography and branding throughout the game. The in-game music was astounding with contributions from The Chemical Brothers, Orbital and Leftfield. Such was the quality of the soundtrack that a *WipEout* album was released later in the year featuring additional tracks from bands such as The Shamen, New Order and The Prodigy, although none of these were in the game.

The game itself was a super slick futuristic anti-gravity racer; insanely fast with some fantastical ramped jumps. *WipEout* looked and felt like a new era of gaming. Indeed, if this was the future of PlayStation games then we were going to be spoilt rotten.

Psygnosis had a second game ready to publish, the chaotic and fun-filled world of *Destruction Derby*. Not only must you finish first but gain points by damaging as much of the opposition as possible. Damage inflicted had actual consequences rather than the self-healing indestructibility of other racing games and any damage incurred caused severe handling issues. There's no pit lane here to save you either. After the elegance and smooth lines of *WipEout*, *Destruction Derby* treated us to a raucous and disruptive alternative. The future looked bright for Psygnosis.

SNES fans were exploding around their nether regions with news that Nintendo was to release *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* within days, firstly in Japan with the USA and UK getting their versions two months later. *Yoshi's Island* was a prequel to the original and differed from it in several aspects. You do not control Mario, who is portrayed as a baby, but several Yoshi dinosaurs. The graphics look like they were drawn by someone in pre-school with



» [SNES] Don't be put off by the finger-painted primary school graphics style as it belies a superb game underneath.

a fistful of crayons, deliberately so in this case, and they worked surprisingly boosted with the Super FX2 chip and its sprite-scaling effects.

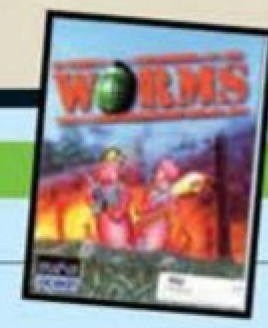
Nintendo took its *Mario* platform formula, fine-tuned the elements, and came up with an engaging and genuinely fun game to play. The graphics may look childish and ill-drawn but don't be duped, it had all the slickness and playability of the original. Strangely Nintendo had been sitting on this completed game for several months before deciding on a release date.

Virgin Interactive confirmed that its sequel to *Cool Spot* would be completed and on sale before Santa empties his sack down your chimney. While the Mega Drive version was, the Saturn and PlayStation conversions were a year late. *Spot Goes To Hollywood* was another platform game similar in style to the original although this time viewed in a pseudo-3D isometric perspective. Spot was stuck in a movie projector and must manoeuvre from film to film, through different genres, to escape whilst rescuing his friends. The obligatory collecting element remained: red spots for points and stars to open bonus levels. All pretty standard fare unfortunately, and despite the new look and some lovely graphics the game itself was underwhelmingly average.

SNES
1 International Superstar Soccer (Konami)
2 Donkey Kong Country (Nintendo)
3 Unirally (Nintendo)
4 Starwing (Nintendo)
5 Animaniacs (Konami)



AMIGA
1 Worms (Team 17)
2 Sensible World Of Soccer (Renegade)
3 FIFA International Soccer (Electronic Arts)
4 Soccer Stars '96 (Empire)
5 Premier Manager 3 (Gremlin Interactive)



MUSIC
1 Never Forget (Take That)
2 Country House (Blur)
3 I Luv U Baby (Original)
4 Roll With It (Oasis)
5 Waterfalls (TLC)



Another returning character was *Bomberman* in his third instalment of the series on the SNES. With added multi-tap five-player gaming and the addition of quirky power-ups including riding a kangaroo for extra abilities, Nintendo tweaked the franchise enough to not be accused of churning out the same old stuff. Far from it, *Bomberman 3* was a fine addition to the family.

With summer mostly out of the way, software companies were steadying themselves for the Christmas marketing push with their big name games. When we say big name games, we obviously mean games that have an expensive movie licence attached to them.

Capcom showed its hand early by releasing its conversion of the *Street Fighter: The Movie* coin-op game onto Sega Saturn and PlayStation. While the arcade game played very well, the home versions were less than great with poor character animation and even poorer controls. Maybe gamers were just becoming tired of rehashed, reheated *Street Fighter* guff?



» [Virtual Boy] That red blob is you, the other red blobs are something, and that red mist is my short fuse about to go off.

Acclaim had *Alien Trilogy*, a *Doom*-style shooter, coming out on the Saturn and PlayStation. Early previews looked excellent and when released, the final version confirmed this. Acclaim also had its take on the dodgy pirate movie, *Cutthroat Island*. The Mega Drive version was under development and by the time it was released it looked under-developed.

Virgin Interactive announced it would be publishing *Blade Runner*. With the movie having a cult following, the game would have a hard act to follow but thankfully the developers at Westwood Studios produced a quite superb point-and-click adventure. Not so superb was the eventual release date of November 1997 and then only on PC.



» [PlayStation] Psygnosis and The Designers Republic came up with something quite special.



» [PlayStation] Racing, damage, cars – what was not to love about *Destruction Derby*?

Next up was *Water World*. The Kevin Costner movie was being published, fittingly, by Ocean across several formats including Game Boy, SNES and Virtual Boy. Mega Drive, Sega Saturn and 3DO versions were also planned but never released. The multi-format releases produced some very different games which varied drastically in quality. The Virtual Boy, released this month in America, had the stand-out version...

Water World on the Virtual Boy was worse than awful, it was an unmitigated slurry pit of festering pixels that contaminated your eyes and with help from the hardware also made you nauseous. There were only 22 games released on the system, yet *Water World* is frequently cited as being the worst. That's the worst of a bunch of rubbish games on a really rubbish console. That's not good in anyone's books.

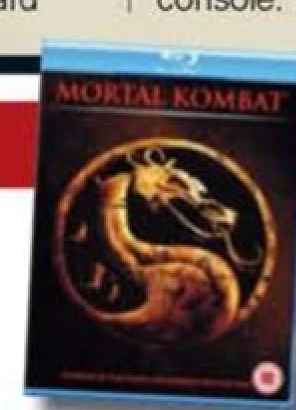
AUGUST 1995 NEWS

25 August saw the UK premiere of *The Usual Suspects*. Starring Kevin Spacey, it's a crime thriller which saw Spacey's conman character Verbal Kint tell the story of a bodged drugs heist on a ship that isn't all it seems. Re-telling the story to a FBI agent, Kint recalls the history of the mysterious and brutal, almost fabled, criminal mastermind Keyser Söze. But just who is Keyser Söze?

On 11 August, the post-apocalyptic film *Water World* was released in the UK. It starred Kevin Costner as a mariner who unwillingly helps a woman and girl being chased by anarchic outlaws in a world where the ice caps have completely melted and land is all but gone.

With a $175 million budget it was the most expensive movie made at that time. Although critics panned it, it certainly wasn't the turd many thought.

18 August saw movies and videogames collide once again with the cinema release of *Mortal Kombat*. The ancient tournament of *Mortal Kombat* sees fighters from different realms fight.



» *Mortal Kombat* turned out to be a surprisingly decent film adaptation.

Raiden (played by Christopher Lambert) leads the Earth realm and Shang Tsung rules over Outworld. *Mortal Kombat* was *Shakespearian* compared to *Street Fighter* or the woeful *Double Dragon* movie, with some of the characterisations very well constructed. It might not grab any awards for acting but we bet it appears on many people's guilty pleasures movie lists.

August 9 saw the sad death of Grateful Dead lead guitarist, singer and founder member Jerry Garcia.

THIS MONTH IN...

MEAN MACHINES SEGA



An import review of the Sega Saturn game *Parodius Deluxe* scored highly, adding further to the Saturn's impressive early software releases. An added bonus of the original game combined with this superb conversion of the SNES release of *Ultimate Parodius* was as bizarre and amazing to play as previous incarnations.



PC GAMES



Sticking out like a retro beacon of light in a barren landscape was the sequel to a very familiar name; *Lords Of Midnight: Citadel* programmed again by Mike Singleton. While it scored 86%, other magazines were a lot more caustic, picking on its graphical user interface and impenetrable gameplay. They were wrong.

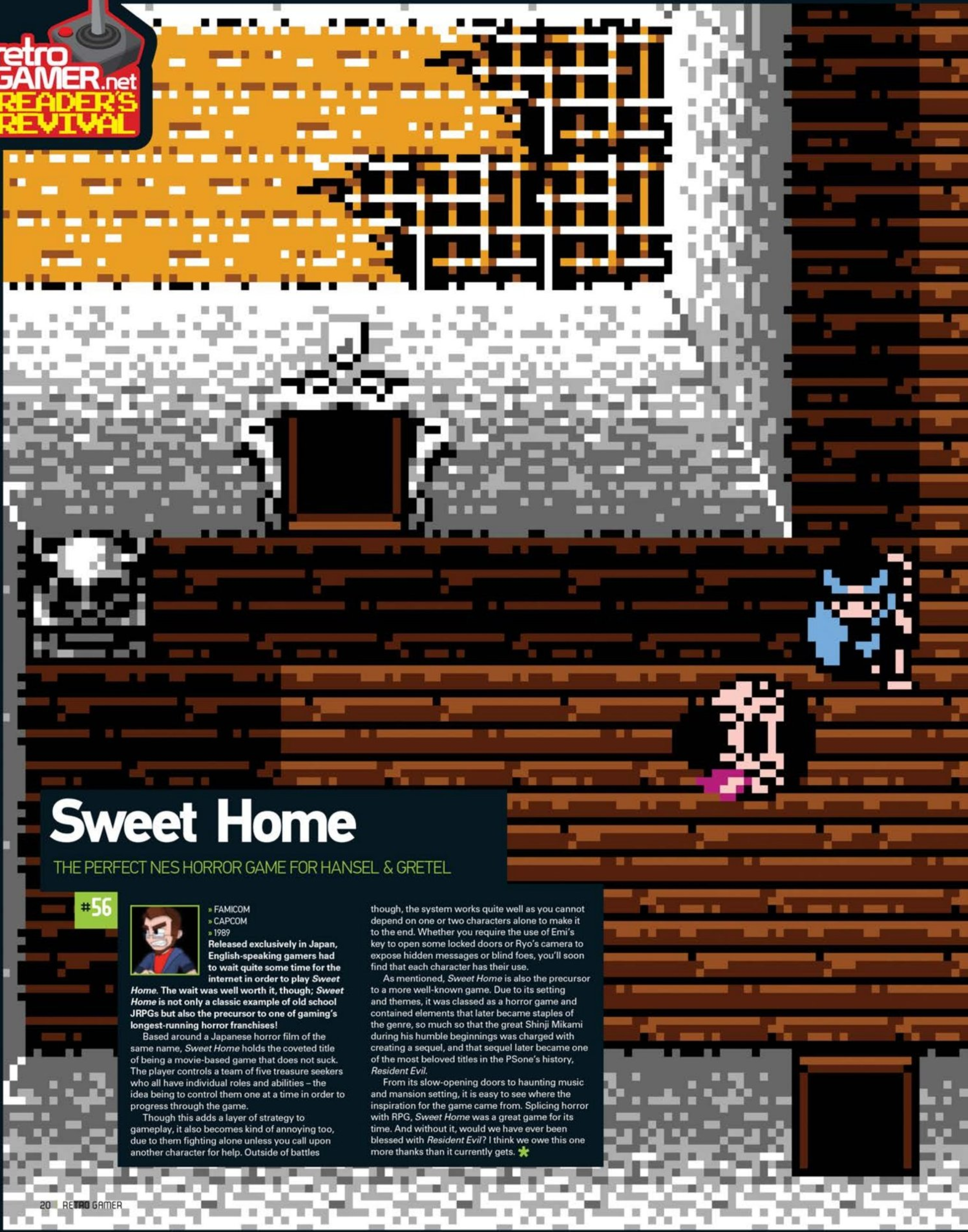


COMMODORE FORMAT



The flimsy 26-page *CF* had words with new Commodore owners Escom. In their press conference they optimistically stated they were to revive C64 production and had exciting plans for the Amiga brand ending with the affirming news that "Escom, Commodore and Amiga would be a success story". Epic fail.





Sweet Home

THE PERFECT NES HORROR GAME FOR HANSEL & GRETEL

#56

» FAMICOM
» CAPCOM
» 1989

Released exclusively in Japan, English-speaking gamers had to wait quite some time for the internet in order to play *Sweet Home*. The wait was well worth it, though; *Sweet Home* is not only a classic example of old school JRPGs but also the precursor to one of gaming's longest-running horror franchises!

Based around a Japanese horror film of the same name, *Sweet Home* holds the coveted title of being a movie-based game that does not suck. The player controls a team of five treasure seekers who all have individual roles and abilities – the idea being to control them one at a time in order to progress through the game.

Though this adds a layer of strategy to gameplay, it also becomes kind of annoying too, due to them fighting alone unless you call upon another character for help. Outside of battles though, the system works quite well as you cannot depend on one or two characters alone to make it to the end. Whether you require the use of Emi's key to open some locked doors or Ryo's camera to expose hidden messages or blind foes, you'll soon find that each character has their use.

As mentioned, *Sweet Home* is also the precursor to a more well-known game. Due to its setting and themes, it was classed as a horror game and contained elements that later became staples of the genre, so much so that the great Shinji Mikami during his humble beginnings was charged with creating a sequel, and that sequel later became one of the most beloved titles in the PSone's history, *Resident Evil*.

From its slow-opening doors to haunting music and mansion setting, it is easy to see where the inspiration for the game came from. Splicing horror with RPG, *Sweet Home* was a great game for its time. And without it, would we have ever been blessed with *Resident Evil*? I think we owe this one more thanks than it currently gets. ✱



RETROBATE PROFILE

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THE ULTIMATE YEARS





ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME WAS SET UP IN NOVEMBER 1982 AND MADE AN INDELIBLE MARK ON GAMING HISTORY. NOW, 30 YEARS ON, MARTYN CARROLL OPENS THE YEARBOOKS ON THE REVERED SOFTWARE HOUSE

It's a common mistake to think of Ultimate as solely the Stamper brothers. Coder Chris and graphics artist Tim were obviously integral to the company's success, but others played a key part too. Chief among these was John Lathbury, a software engineer who worked alongside the Stampers at two coin-op firms – Associated Leisure and later Zilec Electronics. Here, they converted existing games to run on various arcade hardware and also developed original titles like *Blue Print*.

It was lucrative work and they soon opted to go it alone. In 1982 the trio formed Ashby Computers & Graphics, named after Ashby-de-la-Zouch, where they were based. As ACG they developed new coin-op games but quickly discovered that the cost of competing in the fast-moving arcade industry was prohibitively expensive. Within months, they decided to sideline coin-op work and concentrate on the booming home computer market. For this new venture they established the trade name Ultimate Play The Game. At the same time, three became four as graphic designer Carole Ward was made a director and equal partner.

The ZX Spectrum was selected as their lead development platform for two reasons. Firstly, Chris and John had experience in programming the machine's Z80 processor, and secondly, the Spectrum had a large and ever-growing user base. And to ensure they targeted all Spectrum owners, their initial releases were designed to run on the bog-standard 16K model.

Ultimate's games never carried credits, so it's impossible to fully determine just how much input John and Carole had in each individual game. Or Chris and Tim, for that matter. But then the team clearly didn't care about standing in the spotlight, preferring instead to let the software take centre stage. And when you consider the number of classic titles Ultimate released – *Jetpac, Atic Atac, Knight Lore* and more, all detailed over the next few pages – that stance makes perfect sense.

[1983]

Jetpac was the first game I got for my shiny new 16K Spectrum and I played it every day

TONY WILLIAMS ON ULTIMATE'S DEBUT RELEASE

Ultimate released its debut Spectrum game, *Jetpac*, in May. The previous six months had been spent building a software development system and writing programming tools. It would prove to be time well spent, as *Jetpac* was a massive hit. *C&VG* awarded the game 9/10, saying: "*Jetpac* is very playable, addictive." The game rocketed to the number one spot on the Spectrum chart and was named 'Game of the Year' at the inaugural Golden Joystick Awards.

Jetpac marked a series of firsts: the first Ultimate release, the first appearance of Jetman, and the first game to really show that the Spectrum could deliver an authentic arcade-at-home experience. Durell's Mike Richardson, creator of *Scuba Dive* and *Turbo Esprit*, was amazed when he first played the game: "I was completely blown away by it. The professional look of the graphics combined with the brilliant gameplay – it was fantastic."

Jetpac inspired budding programmers such as Tony Williams, who would later develop the unreleased Spectrum version of Rare's *Solar Jetman*. "*Jetpac* was the first game I got for my shiny new 16K Spectrum and I played it every day," he says. "At the time, my only programming had been in BASIC, and *Jetpac* motivated me to learn Z80 assembler so I could make games like it. I remember the sense of wonder at how amazing these people must be to create such great games."

Ultimate's custom development setup enabled it to quickly produce quality games. *Jetpac* was followed by a further three releases for the 16K Spectrum – *Pssst*, *Cookie* and, proving that there was more to Ultimate than single-screen shooters, the top-down racing game *Tranz Am*.

In November, Ultimate released *Lunar Jetman*, sequel to *Jetpac* and its first game for the bigger-memory 48K Spectrum. The game was reviewed in the launch issue of *Crash* magazine and scored 95%. Of all Ultimate's releases, this was the one that most impressed editor Roger Kean when it arrived at Crash Towers. He says: "I guess *Jetpac* was the most astonishing – I remember actually caring about Jetman, not an emotion usually associated with the Spectrum's blobs. But I'll opt for *Lunar Jetman* because of its context in time and the state of games development for the Spectrum. And there was the mystery of the infamous trailer, that reader screenshot *Crash* published. Robin Candy claimed within days that it was a hoax, and so it proved, but how typically cryptic of the Stampers to remain silent on the subject."

By releasing five first-class titles in a little over six months, Ultimate quickly established itself as the UK software house to watch. Yet nobody was quite prepared for what surprises it had in store for 1984.

TRICKY VIC

Ultimate was keen to convert its early Spectrum hits to other computers, and in late 1983 released a very good version of *Jetpac* for the VIC-20. It's rumoured that the port was done by Ultimate, but the in-house team found it such a slog to get right that all future 6502 conversion work was farmed out to other programmers.



» [VIC-20] *Jetpac* on the VIC was close to the original.

RELEASED GAMES

JETPAC



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 16K
- RELEASE DATE: MAY 1983
- HIGHEST SCORE: 9/10 (C&VG)

Ultimate's first game was an instant classic. Help Jetman fuel up his spaceship and escape the planet while dodging asteroids and aliens. Great graphics with challenging gameplay resulted in a stunning debut.

PSSST



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 16K
- RELEASE DATE: JUNE 1983
- HIGHEST SCORE: 5/5 (HOME COMPUTER WEEKLY)

Behind the cutesy graphics and twee scenario lay a fiendish arcade blaster that was every bit as fast and frantic as *Jetpac*. Seeing the plant flower for the first time was a special sight.

TRANZ AM



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 16K
- RELEASE DATE: JULY 1983
- HIGHEST SCORE: 8/10 (C&VG)

Ultimate's only driving game saw you racing around a barren landscape, collecting trophies and fuel while avoiding deadly rivals and damn cactuses. Not a classic, but still an impressive, technically accomplished title.

COOKIE



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 16K
- RELEASE DATE: JULY 1983
- HIGHEST SCORE: 5/5 (HOME COMPUTER WEEKLY)

Taking control of Charlie the chef, you fired ingredients into the mixing bowl and threw rubbish in the bin. A companion piece to *Pssst*, *Cookie* managed to be both delightfully charming and thoroughly challenging.

LUNAR JETMAN



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 1983
- HIGHEST SCORE: 5/5 (HOME COMPUTER WEEKLY)

The sequel to *Jetpac* was bigger, though not necessarily better. Driving the moon rover was a 'wow' moment, but it was overly difficult, a touch too complex and lacked the original's appeal.

[1984]



We loaded the game up and multiple jaws hit the floor

JON RITMAN ON THE IMPACT OF KNIGHT LORE

Ultimate kicked off the new year in fine style with the release of *Atic Atac*, its second game for the 48K Spectrum. This arcade adventure actually slipped out in the final few days of 1983, but made its mark on the charts in January and February, giving Ultimate its third Spectrum number one.

Rival software houses were desperate to discover the secret of Ultimate's chart-topping success, yet the team didn't move in the same circles as other developers. "They were very much the Howard Hughes of software development," says John Gibson, programmer at Imagine Software and later Denton Designs. "Imagine regarded Ultimate as their main competitors and hired a private detective to find out as much as he could about their development processes. But he managed to glean very little other than the fact that Ultimate used Sage computers for developing their games. The Sage IV was the state-of-the-art machine at the time – a 68032 processor, 2MB of RAM and an 18MB hard disk, all for a breathtaking £7,000. Not long after Imagine was given this information, I turned up at work to find that my Apple IIe had been replaced with a Sage IV! I know now, of course, that the guys at Ultimate were ex-arcade developers and so the secret of their success was simply their development experience."

While Imagine and others were trying to keep up, Ultimate was forging ahead with its next release. Anticipation built, but as was becoming the norm, no firm details were forthcoming. Months passed and finally, in April, magazines began to carry teaser ads for the new game. The name: *Sabre Wulf*. The price: £9.95! That was almost twice as much as previous Ultimate games, and was apparently due to the game's increased development time.

The price increase was chewed over in several reviews, particularly as the game was fairly similar in look and feel to *Atic Atac*. Still, *Sabre Wulf* reviewed strongly and provided Ultimate with another number one. To help justify the inflated cost, the game came in high-quality cardboard packaging, complete with a glossy manual. These premium 'big boxes' would become the norm for Ultimate's next few releases.

Sabre Wulf introduced Sabreman, a sword-wielding explorer. Before the year was out, he would return in two adventures. The first was *Underwurlde*, a vast arcade platformer, and the other was *Knight Lore*. By now people expected Ultimate to deliver, but no one was prepared for the impact of the latter, the first 'Filmation' title.

Former Ocean programmer Jon Ritman remembers the evolution of Ultimate's output. "The first Ultimate games I saw were *Jetpac* and *Pssst* at a show. They easily had the best graphics I'd seen and inspired me to improve my own output leading to the release of *Bear Bovver*. But that was early days for Ultimate. They had much greater tricks up their sleeve.

"The day I handed over the master for *Match Day* to Ocean, managing director David Ward gave me a cassette and told me this was something I needed to see. I took the game over to Crystal Computing, friends of mine in Manchester, and there we loaded the game up. There was a short silence as multiple jaws hit the floor. Needless to say the game was the wonderful *Knight Lore*. I knew straight away that I needed to work out how Ultimate had achieved this masterpiece because I wanted to make games using the same technique. Neither *Batman* nor *Head Over Heels* would have been made without it. Later I got to know the Stamper family pretty well and lost count of the number of hours Chris and I spent on the phone, usually around 2am, discussing arcane aspects of programming. They were great guys and an inspiration to the rest of the gaming world."

Steve Wetherill of Software Projects and Odin was similarly inspired by Ultimate's releases during this year, but rather its 2D games. "Stoo Fotheringham and I completed *Sabre Wulf* and *Underwurlde* when we were

LOST AND FOUND

This was the year in which Ultimate first teased *Mire Mare*, the infamous Sabreman adventure that never materialised. In short, nothing existed beyond the title, the cover art, and some design scribbles (see **RG** 105 for the full story). One 'lost' title that has since been found is the BBC Micro version of *Cookie*. Programmer Paul Proctor actually completed the port in early 1984, and it was very close to the Spectrum original and even featured music by Martin Galway, but for reasons unknown Ultimate chose to shelve it. The game was successfully recovered in 2002. See Stairway To Hell (**www.stairwaytohell.com**) for more information.



» [BBC Micro] The BBC Micro version of *Cookie* has since been rescued from the trash can.

both working at Software Projects. We even mapped out *Sabre Wulf*. I liked both of those games a lot, and the influences show in Odin's *Robin Of The Wood* and *Nodes Of Yesod*. I also remember seeing *Knight Lore* for the first time running on a display in a store window. It was quite an incredible sight."

Mark Eyles, formerly of Quicksilva and now a game design lecturer at the University of Portsmouth, was also surprised by *Knight Lore*. "It was very impressive," he says. "Ultimate set the quality bar very high, but it wasn't just that they were producing high-quality titles. They also approached game development in a very professional way. They knew exactly what they were doing and this set them apart from some of the bedroom coders who were still trying to break into the industry at this time."

One thing Ultimate clearly understood was that its strength lay in its mastery of the Z80 chip; for the 6502 computers, it looked to outsource projects. Conversions for the BBC Micro were handled by David Rhys Jones (*Jetpac* and *Atic Atac*) and then Paul Proctor (*Sabre Wulf* onwards). It was reported that *Jetpac* was in line to be converted to the C64, but instead Ultimate would release a series of original titles for the popular 8-bit. That came about when Dave Thomas and his brother Bob took a chance and sent Ultimate a copy of a C64 game they'd written while living at home with their parents. It was called *The Staff Of Karnath* and was heavily influenced by the 1962 fantasy film *Jack The Giant Killer*.

"Bob and I had seen their Spectrum games and were as impressed as anybody else with them," reveals Dave. "The C64 was doing well at the time and it was in the back of our minds that they might decide to convert their existing games or consider someone else doing it for them. When we had finished *Karnath* we really thought it looked very nice and was definitely something they might be interested in. To our surprise, Ultimate saw the game and signed us up on the spot."

The Staff Of Karnath was released in December and received strong reviews. It marked the first appearance of Sir Arthur Pendragon, who'd go on to star in three more titles. Other C64-specific games followed, and conversions of existing Spectrum hits were prepared for the C64, MSX and Amstrad CPC computers. Ultimate was about to branch out.

RELEASED GAMES

ATIC ATAC



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 1983
- HIGHEST SCORE: 92% (CRASH)

The scenario may have been familiar – escape from a creepy old castle – but Ultimate surprised everyone with the sheer quality of this arcade adventure. Some shooting was involved, but this game was more about exploring the castle, discovering short cuts, finding useful objects, and flummoxing famous monsters like Dracula and Frankenstein.

SABRE WULF



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: JUNE 1984
- HIGHEST SCORE: 9/10 (C&VG)

Sabreman's memorable debut drew comparisons to *Atic Atac*, but it was actually more of a straightforward maze game than an arcade adventure. The graphics and animation were first class, and there were plenty of clever ideas like the mysterious orchids, but it was often too easy to get lost or killed, leading to frustration.

UNDERWURLDE



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 1984
- HIGHEST SCORE: 92% (CRASH)

This exciting sequel to *Sabre Wulf* switched the viewpoint from top-down to side-on, thereby introducing the effects of gravity. Cue Sabreman jumping, falling, flipping and bouncing around the game's expansive network of rooms and caverns like a pinball. Dogged perseverance was required – and rewarded.

KNIGHT LORE



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 1984
- HIGHEST SCORE: 10/10 (PERSONAL COMPUTER GAMES)

Sabreman's third outing was a revelation on release, with the eye-popping isometric viewpoint leading to numerous clones. While the quest was to break the lycanthropy curse that had befallen Sabreman, it was hard not to fall under the game's own spell and just spend days exploring the amazing castle setting.

THE STAFF OF KARNATH



- FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
- RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 1984
- HIGHEST SCORE: 4/5 (COMMODORE USER)

Ultimate's Commodore 64 debut marked the first appearance of Sir Arthur Pendragon. Although not developed in-house, it certainly had the feel of an Ultimate game – even the objective of solving puzzles in a haunted castle was familiar. It was nicely polished too, with bold graphics used throughout.

[1985]

They liked being slightly secretive and mysterious in the eyes of their fans

DAVE THOMAS ON THE SHADOWY STAMPER BROTHERS

Barely three months after releasing the awesome twosome of *Underwurlde* and *Knight Lore*, Ultimate put out another Spectrum classic. *Alien 8* was essentially *Knight Lore* in space, yet it was difficult to begrudge the company for capitalising on its groundbreaking Filmation system before the inevitable copycats arrived. And it certainly reviewed very well in the Spectrum magazines – *Crash* rated it higher than *Knight Lore*.

In this year, the in-house team was bolstered by the arrival of a new recruit. Fresh out of high school, programmer Mark Betteridge joined Ultimate and began working on an updated version of the Filmation system. Meanwhile, Dave and Bob Thomas were busy preparing *Entombed*, the second Arthur Pendragon adventure. Although they worked from home, the brothers developed a close relationship with Chris and Tim. "We visited the Stampers and their parents many times at Ashby," says Dave. "We were pretty much in awe of them at the time and couldn't quite believe we were working with them. Both Tim and Chris were enormously talented but liked to keep themselves to themselves and were very reluctant to get publicity for anything other than their games. I think they quite liked the idea of being slightly secretive and mysterious in the eyes of their fans."

Dave reveals that Ultimate was very hands-off – a surprising admission when you consider the care and attention it clearly lavished on its titles. "Ultimate didn't put huge time constraints on us," he says. "I don't recall being given specific deadlines for each of the titles. They were very good at leaving us alone to complete the games. Actually, I do remember that the title music for *Entombed* was one of the things that Tim drew the line at. He told me the opening bars sounded similar to 'a cat being strangled'. Needless to say I swiftly rewrote the tune in more ear-friendly tones!"

Entombed arrived in June and was lapped up by the lads at *Zzap!64*. The newly launched Commodore mag awarded the game a Gold Medal Award and a 93% overall rating. As with *Karnath*, *Entombed* mixed puzzles, action and exploration, and retained the distinctive viewpoint that resembled an open doll's house. "At the time we honestly thought the graphics looked outstanding and very different from anything else we'd seen," says Dave. "We didn't really set out to create the strong visual style; it just turned out that way. Yet when I look back at the Arthur Pendragon games now I think the graphics look really awful! In *Karnath*, why on earth did we colour the castle walls blue?"

One criticism levelled at the games was the perplexing nature of some of the puzzles. This was intentional, according to Dave. "I think we made a conscious decision to make them hard due to the fact that they were actually relatively small adventures. The problem was that in doing so we made some of the puzzles seem rather obscure and I think it's this that some people found annoying. I don't remember the games being play-tested much by anyone other than Bob and I for debugging purposes."

In August, Ultimate released *Nightshade*, its latest Spectrum game. The title

RELEASED GAMES



ALIEN 8

- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 1985
- HIGHEST SCORE: 95% (CRASH)

This was *Knight Lore* revisited, with Sabreman seemingly replaced by Robbie the Robot from *Pssst*. But there was more to the game than first met the eye. It may have looked like a carbon copy of *Knight Lore* with similar gameplay, but *Alien 8* possessed a certain charm that made for a more engaging, entertaining game.



ENTOMBED

- FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
- RELEASE DATE: JUNE 1985
- HIGHEST SCORE: 93% (ZZAP)

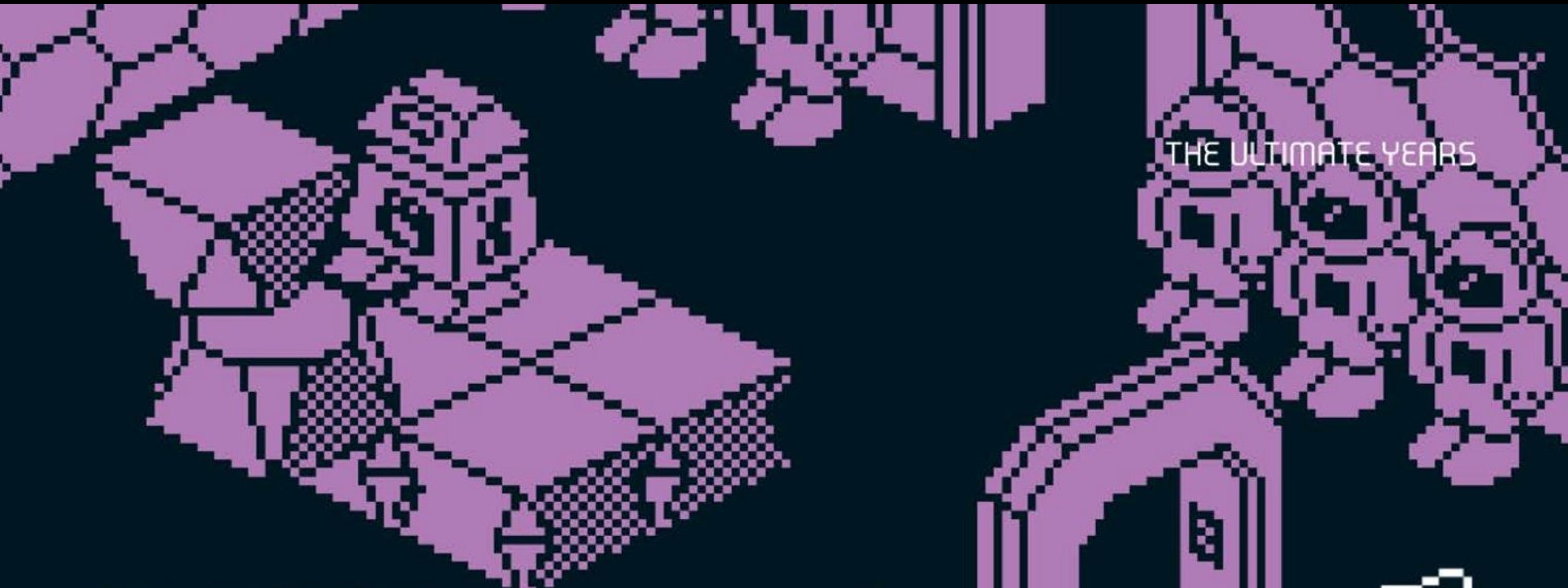
The second Arthur Pendragon adventure shifted the action to an expansive Egyptian tomb and was even better for it. The game once again mixed puzzles and exploration, although this time around there was thankfully less boring backtracking. Some of the puzzles were too obscure or needlessly fussy, however.



NIGHTSHADE

- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 1985
- HIGHEST SCORE: 5/5 (SINCLAIR USER)

For this release, Ultimate updated its isometric engine and the results were amazing – technically, at least. The viewpoint now scrolled, with walls cleverly disappearing when you stepped through doors, and more colour was splashed about. Sadly, beneath the surface gloss lay a rather tired game that wasn't much fun to play.



showcased the new 'Filmation II' system in which the viewpoint scrolled rather than flicked. *Nightshade* was highly rated by the press, but the general consensus was that the game fell slightly short of Ultimate's usual high standards. A reviewer for *Crash* wrote: "I can't say that I was as impressed as I have been in the past. Compared to earlier releases it's lacking in playability."

If the Ultimate magic was beginning to fade, it was far more apparent on the Commodore 64. *Blackwyche*, the third Arthur Pendragon game, was released in October and scored 53% in *Zzap!64*. The reviewers criticised the similarities to the previous games in the series. "Sad to see Ultimate turn out a program like this," concluded the review.

Yet sadness turned to despair when it came to Ultimate's next C64 title. *Imhotep* was written by Manuel Caballero, who like the Thomas brothers, submitted it to Ultimate on spec. The game was released just before Christmas and *Zzap!64* ripped it to shreds, awarding it just 20%. The chief reason for such a low score was the game's repetitive and frustrating gameplay – something that Manuel is keen to address. "Most reviewers think *Imhotep* only has one level – the birds and the pyramids scrolling level," he explains. "If that were the case it would indeed be a shallow and boring game. Little do they know – mainly because Ultimate never told them – that was just the first of eight separate levels. Some are easier than the first level, which I thought was pretty easy and my beta testers at the time had no problem with. Unfortunately, the reviewers didn't appreciate how quickly kids can master these games and get bored with them when they're too easy. Ultimate never asked me to make it easier. In fact, they didn't ask me to change anything at all."

Faring marginally better on the C64 were two Spectrum ports – *Sabre Wulf*, converted by Greg Duddle, and *Underwurlde* by Grant Harrison. Both were licensed to Firebird and were faithful to the Z80 originals. Other conversions released this year included *Knight Lore, Alien 8* and *Nightshade* for both the BBC Micro and MSX. *Sabre Wulf* was converted to the Amstrad CPC, initially as part of Ocean's *They Sold A Million* compilation and later released as a standalone title. Before the year was out, the CPC also received the classic Filmation pairing of *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*, with both games benefiting from an extra splash of colour. Release-wise it was a busy year for Ultimate, yet worryingly the firm appeared to be happy trading on past glories rather than creating the kind of innovative, exciting new games it was famous for.

> If the Ultimate magic was beginning to fade, it was far more apparent on the Commodore 64



BLACKWYCHE

- FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
- RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 1985
- HIGHEST SCORE: 4/5 (COMMODORE USER)

Pendragon's third outing found him aboard a haunted galleon. It was essentially more of the same, except it was even more difficult this time around, with energy-sapping enemies occupying almost every screen. The death sequence was nice, though – until you'd seen it a hundred times. One plus point: the puzzles were more logical.



IMHOTEP

- FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
- RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 1985
- HIGHEST SCORE: 3/5 (COMMODORE USER)

This release was regularly mistaken for a straightforward shooter – mainly because the initial flying sections were so tricky that many players never reached the platforming levels that lay later in the game. Even then they weren't missing much. Graphics were good, though, with a decent parallax scrolling effect.

ULTIMATE COLLECTABLES

Ultimate games are coveted by collectors and you'll usually pay a premium to pick up the more uncommon titles. But there are some scarce releases that are particularly difficult to find and can command high prices. Examples include Firebird's *Super Silver Disk*, a two-in-one pack for the C64 that features *Sabre Wulf* and *Underwurlde* on a 5.25-inch floppy. Then there's *Cosmic Battlezones*, a collection for the BBC Micro, which is sought after because one of the three games featured, *Lunar Jetman*, was never released as a standalone on the Beeb. And finally there are the Japanese MSX cartridge versions of *Knight Lore, Alien 8, Nightshade* and *Gunfright*. Featuring unique cover artwork, these fantastic variations should be high on the wanted list of any serious Ultimate collector.



» The desirable MSX ROM carts were presented in large, video-sized packaging.

[1986]

> I received a printout of the Z80 source code and I took the graphics straight from the binary file

SHAHID AHMAD ON CONVERTING SPECTRUM GAMES TO THE COMMODORE 64

Ultimate saw in the new year with two Wild West adventures. There was no ugly – this was Ultimate, after all – but there was the good in *Gunfright* for the Spectrum and later CPC/MSX, with the bad represented by *Outlaws* for the C64. *Gunfright* reused the Filmation II system from *Nightshade* and was generally well reviewed. *Outlaws* was an original title, although the chunky graphics identified it as coming from Dave and Bob Thomas. Dave has since revealed that *Outlaws* was quickly rustled up in two or three weeks – and it showed.

Early in the year, news broke that all future Ultimate titles would be promoted and marketed by US Gold. Details were not disclosed, although it's thought that the deal gave US Gold access to the Ultimate back catalogue while Ultimate retained the IP rights. Otherwise it was business as usual, with two more C64 games hitting the shelves – *Dragon Skulle*, the fourth and final Arthur Pendragon game; and *Nightshade*, another Spectrum conversion from Firebird. Coding duties for *Nightshade* fell to programmer Shahid Ahmad. Firebird had already published an isometric game by him, *Chimera*, so he was the obvious choice for the job.

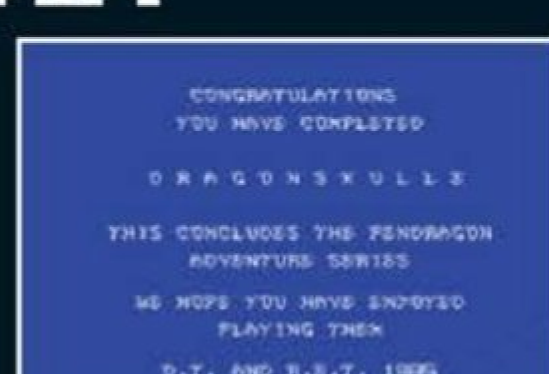
Explaining how he tackled the conversion, Shahid says: "I received a printout of the Z80 source code and I took the graphics straight from the binary file. I had just a month to do the conversion and I was to pay a penalty for every week I was late, so the key was to go for an authentic port. Scrolling isometric was a huge ask of the 6502. I recall spending endless days and nights poring over the original listing, making mental models and translating to 6502. I used the C64's high-res mode to mimic the detail of the Spectrum version, particularly the sprites. Since the game window was of limited size, it was just about possible to do a bitmap full-window update, but it could be pig slow at times. I optimised very heavily. While it didn't run as fast as I would have liked, that it ran at all was something I was proud of."

During the summer, Ultimate released two new Spectrum games, both of which were also ported to the MSX. First up was *Cyberun*, a space shooter with *Lunar Jetman* influences, and this was followed by *Pentagram*, a Sabreman adventure that harked back to the old *Knight Lore* style. *Cyberun* was written by Mark Betteridge, yet it's not known who was responsible for *Pentagram* – it wasn't the Stampers, however, as they later revealed that *Gunfright* was the last Ultimate game they were directly involved in.

Both games were 'Smashed' by *Crash* magazine, while others handed out less stellar scores. "Steer well clear," warned *C&VG*. "Ultimate are going down." Oh dear. When it came to Ultimate game reviews, unanimous praise was clearly a thing of the past.

INSERT CREDIT

Dave Thomas reveals that their contract with Ultimate prevented the brothers from crediting themselves in the Arthur Pendragon games. Regardless, they sneaked their initials onto the final screen of *Dragon Skulle*. "I have no idea whether they knew we'd done this at the time or what their reaction would have been," he says. "It seems incredibly trivial now, though, of course."



RELEASED GAMES

GUNFRIGHT



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 1986
- HIGHEST SCORE: 92% (CRASH)

The great graphics of *Nightshade* married to entertaining action. As the local sheriff, you roamed around town, rounding up bandits and duelling with them in first-person shoot-outs. The last great Ultimate game.

OUTLAWS



- FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
- RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 1986
- HIGHEST SCORE: 35% (ZZAP)

This cowboy caper was a simple shooter featuring similar graphics to the Pendragon games. An enjoyable diversion, but nothing more. C64 owners would have been better served with a version of *Gunfright*.

DRAGON SKULLE



- FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
- RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 1986
- REVIEW SCORES: 49% (ZZAP)

The final Pendragon game was a sad case of diminishing returns. A new menu system was introduced and there was some variation in the challenges, but there simply wasn't enough invention on show.

CYBERUN



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: MAY 1986
- HIGHEST SCORE: 90% (CRASH)

A space game in which you flew around alien planets, finding upgrades for your ship and zapping baddies. Graphics were large and detailed, but *Cyberun* shared a trait with many of the later Ultimate games – it was too damned difficult.

> When it came to Ultimate game reviews, unanimous praise was clearly a thing of the past

PENTAGRAM



- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: JUNE 1986
- REVIEW SCORES: 93% (CRASH)

When you consider how many other developers ripped off Ultimate's isometric games, it's hard to criticise the company for trotting out another *Knight Lore* clone. Sabreman's swan song was a solid if unspectacular adventure that introduced little of note.

BUBBLING UNDER

Bubbler was released for the Spectrum, CPC and MSX, and a C64 version was also in the works. A small outfit called Lynsoft handled the conversion, and was under instruction to replicate the Z80 version as closely as possible. Unfortunately, the end result ran at a snail's pace and Ultimate pulled the plug. It has since been recovered and released by Games That Weren't (**www.gtw64.co.uk**).



[1987]

It wasn't that they rarely gave interviews – they never did. Except to us

ROGER KEAN ON EXCLUSIVE ACCESS WITH THE STAMPERS

Ultimate would release just two games this year – and they would be its last. Developed for the Spectrum and then ported to the CPC and MSX, *Martianoids* and *Bubbler* were both scrolling isometric games. Yet even though they pushed things forward technically, there was the sense that we'd seen it all before.

Programmer Mev Dinc, who developed *Last Ninja 2* for the Spectrum and Amstrad, says: "Ultimate did some amazing things, both in design and programming, especially on the Spectrum. I was inspired by *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* in particular. I actually went one better with my game, *Prodigy*, and added real-time scrolling to the amazing isometric arcade genre that Ultimate created."

Games like *Prodigy* were the problem for Ultimate. The company had been so influential that everyone vied to out-Ultimate Ultimate. And some succeeded: Stephen Crow with *Starquake* and *Firelord*, Steve Turner with *Quazatron*, Jon Ritman with *Head Over Heels*, the Gargoyle guys, the gang at Odin, and so on. As a result, Ultimate's new stuff seemed oddly old hat.

It's debatable whether the Stampers actually cared a great deal about the flailing fortunes of Ultimate. As we now all know, in late 1986 the brothers moved their operation over to a farmhouse in Twycross and set up Rare as a development studio for Nintendo's NES. The whole story was scooped by Newsfield's Roger Kean and Nik Wild, who travelled to Twycross in December 1987 and interviewed the Stampers for a feature that first appeared in *The Games Machine* magazine. For Roger, the invitation was particularly gratifying. He says: "It wasn't that they rarely gave interviews – they never did. Except to us. From the start, the Stampers liked *Crash*, its dedication to Spectrum games and its attitude, and I had several phone conversations with Chris. There was always a carrot of an interview, so it was a pleasant surprise to get a call inviting me and another member of staff to Twycross. So it wasn't difficult to secure the interview – unless you count several years of hard work making magazines the Stampers liked."

Newsfield played a small part in the final Ultimate release. *The Collected Works* gathered together every Ultimate Spectrum game bar *Underwurlde* and was endorsed by *Crash*. Ultimate's light may have faded, but this package was a welcome reminder of how many incredible games the company created in just three short years.

RELEASED GAMES

MARTIANOIDS

- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: APRIL 1987
- HIGHEST SCORE: 6/10 (YOUR SINCLAIR)



An odd, overlooked release in which you controlled a metal droid. But this was no *Alien 8*. Rather than explore rooms, you had to race around a maze-like environment – apparently the 'brain' of a spaceship – and ensure that the evil Martianoids were unable to disrupt the passage of special 'programs'. There was actually a clever little game at work here, providing you were willing to invest some time and overlook its various quirks.

BUBBLER

- FORMAT: SPECTRUM 48K
- RELEASE DATE: JUNE 1987
- HIGHEST SCORE: 78% (CRASH)





Ultimate's disappointing final release. Graphically it was excellent, with a nice, smooth scrolling isometric viewpoint. But the rotate-and-move controls were terrible, and you'd spend so much time rolling helplessly into the ether that the patience of a saint was an unfortunate prerequisite. If you did somehow manage to complete the game, the congratulations screen promised a sequel that never materialised. Sad to say, that was probably no great loss.

THE ULTIMATE LOVE

RARE STAFF PAST AND PRESENT ON THE IMPACT OF ULTIMATE AND ITS GAMES

PAUL MACHACEK

AT RARE FROM 1988 TO PRESENT. NOTABLE WORKS: SUPER OFF ROAD, BATTLETOADS



I still remember the very moment I saw *Knight Lore* for the first time. I knew nothing about it at all, didn't even know it was coming out actually, but I walked into my sixth form study and a guy called Simon who I shared the room with was sitting in front of me playing this incredible-looking 3D thing on his Spectrum. My exact words were, "It's the new Ultimate game, isn't it?" It was my Kennedy moment.

Now, I appreciate your Kennedy moment is meant to be something earth-shattering, groundbreaking, world-changing that forever after you remember where you were when it happened, so does a videogame count? Well, having been an ardent fan of *Sabre Wulf, Knight Lore* was such a revelation that it set the course that I would take.

I remember the thrill of finding each room, one at a time, and slowly mapping the world out on graph paper, as I and countless others had already done for *Sabre Wulf* and *Atic Atac*. I recall the terror of forgetting to be careful as sun turned to moon and back again, which caused an impromptu series of twitches transforming you from Sabreman to the Wulf and back just at the moment you were trying to catch that do-or-die pixel-perfect jump over some spiky thing.

I was already writing games at home myself, so did this game change my world? Well, the last game I wrote while freelance was an isometric room puzzler with scrolling *Nightshade* corridors full of things not to touch, and on showing it to the Stamper brothers, and talking about sheep for half an hour, I ended up at Ultimate's child, Rare, in 1988, just four years after being swayed by that formative hypnotic monochromatic angularity.

Just to cap it all, as I was moving up to the Midlands from Surrey, they let me rent a house at one end of The Green, Ultimate's old offices in the mythical Ashby-de-la-Zouch, where it all started. The day I arrived I followed their dad from Twycross to Ashby, rounded a corner to be confronted by the frontage of The Green and realised that it was the real-life setting for the architecture in *Nightshade*.

Knight Lore didn't just change my world, it became it.

> Knight Lore was such a revelation that it set the course that I would take

KEVIN BAYLISS

AT RARE FROM 1987 TO 2005. NOTABLE WORKS: BATTLETOADS, KILLER INSTINCT, DKC, GOLDENEYE



I loved the Ultimate games. They were really pushing the limits of the machines that were available at the time.

I went to an 'interview' one evening at an old farmhouse, which was Rare's new HQ following on from Ultimate. Tim showed real interest in getting me in after seeing my demo reel that I produced on a Commodore 64 with a black and white TV and a joystick! I went into the farmhouse that night and was gobsmacked as I didn't know Rare was formerly Ultimate. Tim showed me the original artwork for all their amazing titles like *Underwurlde*. I could not believe it.

I was actually pinned to go to Elite Systems, but when Tim asked me if I wanted to join them that evening, I immediately said yes and couldn't sleep that night. I was really into games, very young (16), and loved art.

Tim, Chris and Mark Betteridge were pretty much the core team at Rare then. I think there was about six of us at Christmas 1987. I couldn't believe I had joined them and my life took such a turn. Tim was like my brother and I can honestly say that both Tim and Chris, and Steven too, the third Stamper brother, are some of the nicest guys you could hope to meet. I am so glad to have known them and to have worked with them.

FUEL

STEVE MAYLES

AT RARE FROM 1992 TO PRESENT. NOTABLE WORKS: BANJO-KAZOOIE, VIVA PIÑATA



Sabre Wulf was the standout game for me. The atmosphere created with such basic graphics was incredible. There was a feeling that the map was huge, the excitement and sense of progress when you discovered a new area for the first time and introducing new, ever more exotic animals as you ventured further into the jungle. You really did feel like an early jungle explorer! Reaching the Wulf's path was often nerve-wracking – is he behind me? In front of me?

Finding the amulet pieces was always special – they had a few locations in which they could be hidden, which was a nice touch.

And the orchids! A very simple idea that added loads to the gameplay.

Being the first of the 'big box' games with an intriguing and mysterious cover, a game name you could barely read, all added to the excitement.

First Ultimate game to cost £9.95? I think so. It had to be something special and it was.

MARK POTENTE

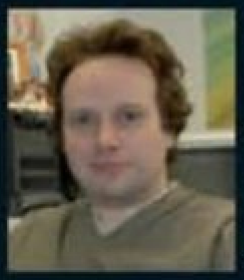
AT RARE IN THE LATE 80S. NOTABLE WORKS: VARIOUS GAMES FOR THE NES



I loved all Ultimate's games on the Spectrum, but the one that really inspired me was *Sabre Wulf*. I remember going round to my mate's house, taking turns to play the game, and mapping it on a massive sheet of paper, complete with all the various spawn points of the amulet. I'm sure I still have that map in the loft somewhere.

WIL OVERTON

AT RARE FROM 2000 TO 2011. NOTABLE WORKS: PERFECT DARK ZERO, JETPAC REFUELLED



By the time I joined Rare in 2000, Ultimate Play The Game was nothing but a distant memory, but for me it was a huge part of wanting to go there. I'd bought *Knight Lore* on the day it came out with my first proper wage packet, dutifully picked up the back catalogue and every release thereafter – yes, even *Imhotep* on the C64 – and, much to my amazement, had won *Crash*'s *Alien 8* mapping compo in '85. So it was a massive thrill, on my first day, to find, there, on a windowsill in a stair passage, duplicates of my *Alien 8* doohicky and the other brass trophies that Ultimate had made for the competitions run in *Crash*.

Tim and Chris were never ones to rest on past glories, but every now and again the Ultimate name would rise up in the course of Rare projects. I didn't get to work on the GBA *Sabre Wulf* game but I did get my chance of a tiny Ultimate connection when we did the XBLA update of *Jetpac*. It would have been nice to make it as near as possible to a proper Ultimate game, but Microsoft rules just don't allow for a game's instructions to amount to only a cryptic paragraph and a big list of 'features'.

TREVOR ATTWOOD

AT RARE FROM 1995 TO 2008. NOTABLE WORKS: DKC2 & 3, PERFECT DARK, SABRE WULF (GBA)



I remember playing Ultimate games like *Lunar Jetman*, *Sabre Wulf* and *Underwurlde*. They always looked and sounded better than the majority of games available at the time. I was also learning assembler on the Spectrum so I could write my own games. I used to look at the Ultimate games to see what was possible in terms of game development, as I found them to be a great source of inspiration.

I will always remember one particular day when I had just completed a demo of my first game, and I decided to show my older brother. He really liked it and said to me, "If you keep going like that, one day you will work for Ultimate!" About seven years later I started working at Rare and my first task was to work on *Donkey Kong Country 2* with the rest of the *DK* team. It's funny how things turn out.

JUSTIN COOK

AT RARE ON AND OFF FROM 1999 TO PRESENT. NOTABLE WORKS: IT'S MR PANTS, VIVA PIÑATA

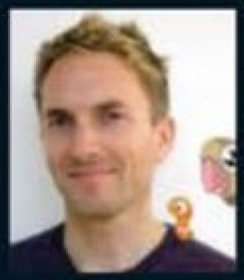


The first Ultimate game I ever bought was *Cookie*. It was a classic example of sticking googly eyes on an object to turn it into a character. The game was simple but fun, and pretty challenging if you wanted to make the cake.

My favourite Ultimate game was *Jetpac*. On purely practical terms, it reliably loaded in a really short time, which was a massive advantage in a Spectrum game. I loved the simple controls but the game had quite a lot of depth just because there were so many enemy types. As the game got harder it became one panicky dash for a part or fuel followed by a screen-clearing gunfight. There were so many different rockets to build it felt like a pretty big game at the time. The only thing I'd change is giving the player more reward for collecting treasure at the top of the screen rather than waiting for it to fall to the bottom.

GREGG MAYLES

AT RARE FROM 1989 TO PRESENT. NOTABLE WORKS: BANJO-KAZOOIE, BATTLETOADS



The release date of each Ultimate game was a massive occasion for me, especially in the era of the wonderfully illustrated boxes. I recall a stall at Derby indoor market where I used to buy most of my games. This was a period of my life between 13 to 15 years old. The guy who ran the stall was really passionate and knowledgeable about games, and always seemed to know when the release date of the next Ultimate game was.

On one occasion my parents took us shopping in Derby on release day of one game, whereupon I immediately went to the market stall. "Sometime this afternoon," the guy said, when I asked him when the game was out. I'm not even sure I knew which game was being released, just that one was! So I spent the rest of the day skulking and sulking around Derby with little to do apart from badgering my parents not to go home. Finally, just as my parents' patience was running out, and not long before the market closed, the game arrived. I couldn't wait to hand over my £9.95 that I had been saving for weeks, but even that didn't buy me much knowledge of what the game was about thanks to the charming but utterly vague instruction manual. This process of eagerly awaiting a game I knew little about that cost much more than everyone else's was repeated a number of times, culminating in *Pentagram*. After this, I knew the magic had gone – the boxes became plastic, too much information was released and the games weren't as good. Although I didn't know it at the time, this was when Ultimate became Rare, the company I was to join a few years later.

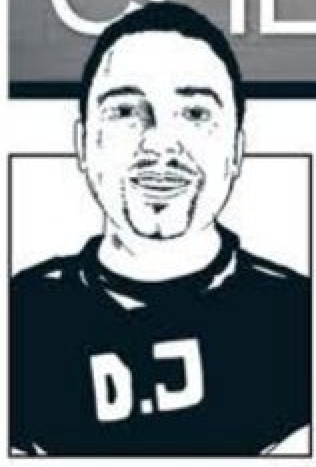
> Sabre Wulf excelled at evoking many emotions, and that is why it was the best

Sabre Wulf was my favourite Ultimate game. Although I was amazed by the technical achievement behind Filmation, I didn't like the fiddly control system, monochromatic colours and slow play of the 3D games such as *Knight Lore*. I preferred the colourful, faster gameplay of the 2D titles. *Sabre Wulf*, for me, was the pinnacle of this type of play, and the sense of exploration and discovery was amazing. I still remember the emotions that I felt playing the game – the hope when entering a potential amulet piece location that one might be there, the joy or disappointment depending on whether it was there, the hopelessness of getting lost, the panic when the fiery explosion thing appeared when you had taken too long on the screen, and of course the dread when you entered a screen and saw the wolf crouching, ready to chase you. Many games evoked emotions when playing, but they tended to be the same emotions throughout. *Sabre Wulf* excelled at evoking many emotions, and for me that is why it was the best.

Ultimate had a big influence on me, and when I got the chance to join as a games tester at 18 I jumped, despite being offered a 'proper job' in a bank and against the advice of everyone. Not a bad idea, as I am still here, having had the chance to work on many memorable games and learn from the people that made the Ultimate years so special.

CLASSIC GAMING FOR UNDER A FIVER

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you really want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune to procure, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than five English pounds…

BARBARIAN: THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR

INFO

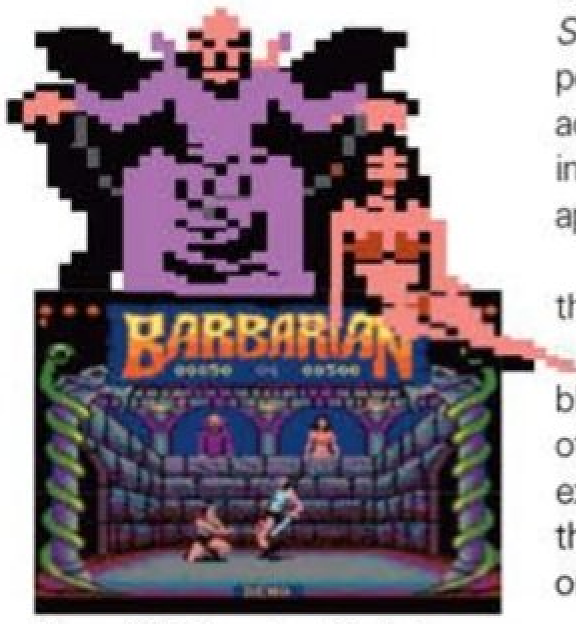
- **SYSTEM:** C64
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** AMSTRAD, SPECTRUM, ACORN ELECTRON, AMIGA, PC, BBC MICRO, APPLE II, ATARI ST
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **PUBLISHER:** PALACE SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE



You have to hand it to Palace Software; it certainly knew how to promote its games. It's rather telling that even today, whenever most gamers think about the excellent slashathon *Barbarian* — as proven by a recent Twitter test — the first thing they think about is the cover, which featured a scantily-clad Maria Whittaker and the bloke who would later be known as 'Wolf from *Gladiators*'.

Of course, using sex to sell a product is certainly nothing new in the entertainment industry, but back in the mid Eighties it was relatively unseen in the videogame industry. Especially to impressionable teenagers like myself whose closest contact with this sort of thing was sneaking a glimpse at page 3 when we thought no one was looking.

And page 3 girls were certainly in vogue when it came to promoting computer games during the Eighties. Samantha Fox kicked everything off with *Samantha Fox Strip Poker* in 1986, with Maria Whittaker popping up (and nearly popping out according to our Making Of *Barbarian*) in 1987, while a snarling Corinne Russell appeared in *Vixen* a year later in 1988.



[Amstrad] All 8-bit versions of *Barbarian* are decent. We obviously prefer the Amstrad one.

What's interesting about *Barbarian* though is that while it obviously used controversial imagery and content to blatantly sell itself, the game (unlike the others we've mentioned) was actually rather excellent, delivering a genuine excitement that's still rarely been bettered in any other one-on-one fighter.

Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior put you in the furry loincloth of a strapping fighter



[C64] Watching that goblin boot a head across the screen will never get boring.

who made Conan the Barbarian look like that little guy you see on the Mr Muscle adverts. Fuelled by a clichéd need to defeat the evil Wizard Drax and rescue Princess Maria, sorry, Mariana, your nameless hero had to face off against eight increasingly deadly adversaries, all of who were just as adept with their weapons as you were.

Barbarian's points system was simple: every time you landed a blow on your opponent you would rob him of a precious life point (each warrior had twelve in total). By holding down the fire button it was possible to pull off a variety of deadly moves that ranged from a vicious kick or headbutt, to a powerful body chop or the fancy web of death. Of course, if you wanted the round to end quickly and could get the timing just right you could simply decapitate your hapless opponent with a devastating head chop.

This powerful blow would not only sever your opponent's unfortunate head from his shoulders, it would also bring on the appearance of a squat ugly goblin who would walk across the screen and drag off the still-warm corpse while unceremoniously booting the head offscreen. It's a hilarious move that still raises a smile even now, but it caused all sorts of controversy back in the day, with the game even going so far as to be banned in Germany, until the blood was changed to a less offensive green.

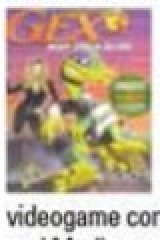
It's this one single move that completely changes the dynamics of Palace's game and still makes it so exciting to play. Out



[C64] Princess Maria, sorry, Mariana becomes far more than just potential arm candy in the second game.

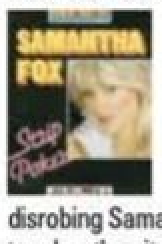
LADY KILLERS More videogame proof that sex sells

Gex 3 Deep Cover Gecko



The final part of the *Gex* trilogy featured Playboy model Marliece Andrada who starred as Agent Xtra, a live action character who looks distinctly at odds with the rest of *Gex*'s videogame content. Nintendo weren't happy, and Marliece was cut from the N64 version.

Samantha Fox's Strip Poker



Remember that scene in *Friends* where Joey wears all of Chandler's clothes? Well, Sam Fox was wearing a similar amount in Martech's *Strip Poker* title. Unsurprisingly, disrobing Samantha of all her clothes was tougher than it looked.

Barbarian 2



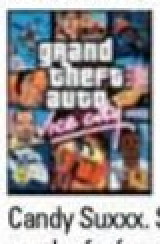
After finding success with *Barbarian*, Palace stuck to the same formula for its sequel and once again hired Maria Whittaker and Wolf from *Gladiators* to appear on the cover. This time you could actually play as Princess Maria, sorry, Mariana.

Vixen



Vixen's controversies easily overshadowed the game itself, which was a dull platformer. Boots refused to stock the game due to the cover, while the game was changed to *She-Fox* in Germany because "vixen" in German sounds identical to a naughty sexual act.

GTA: Vice City



The *Grand Theft Auto* series is no stranger to controversy, so it should come as no surprise to learn that it had an actual adult star (Jenna Jameson) playing pornographic actress Candy Suxxx. Surprisingly, we can't remember much of a fuss being made about it at the time.

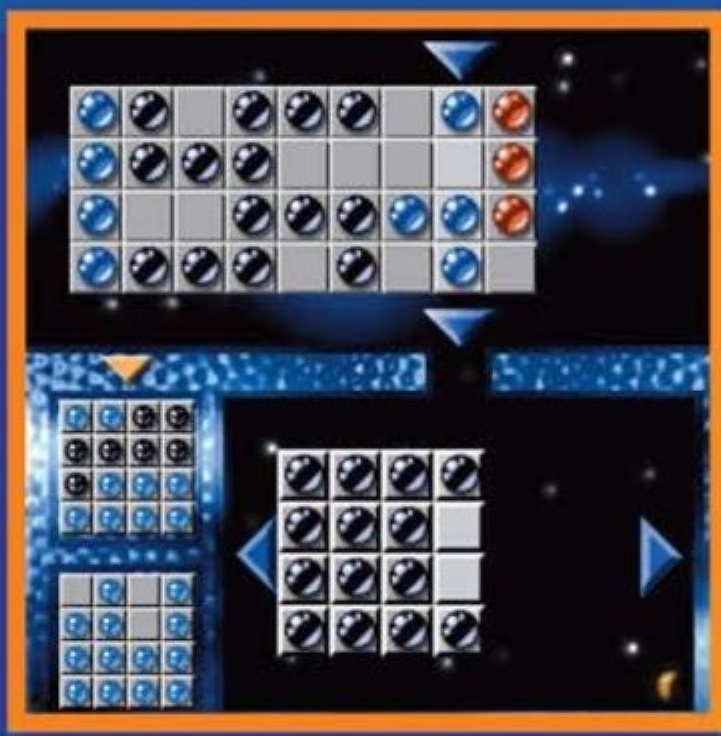
of all the one-on-one fighters we've ever played, few are able to connect with you so personally. Sure, other brawlers could leave you flat-footed with clever parries and outrageous combos, but there's always the fact that given enough time you might be able to pull things back. If you messed up in *Barbarian*, though, and weren't careful, it was literally game over. It's rare to find a game that could end so quickly and so dramatically, and in many ways it's one of the most realistic fighting games we can think of. After all, if you're going to start twatting someone with a sword that's almost as long as you are, odds are it's all going to end in tears.

Barbarian worked because each round you faced you genuinely didn't know if it was going to be your last. While the first few fighters were fairly useless opponents, later adversaries became extremely devious, using clever feints and rolls. Of course, the upside to this was that if you did manage to part them from their noggin, the sense of satisfaction you felt was immense. It was brutal and bloody, and had a marketing campaign that was nothing more than a salacious way of netting additional sales. It was also a hell of a lot of fun, giving it a timeless quality that still makes it a classic 25 years after its original release.



[Spectrum] While the Speccy version only features three life points, you'll still need to land 12 hits to beat your opponent.







AFTER TETRIS

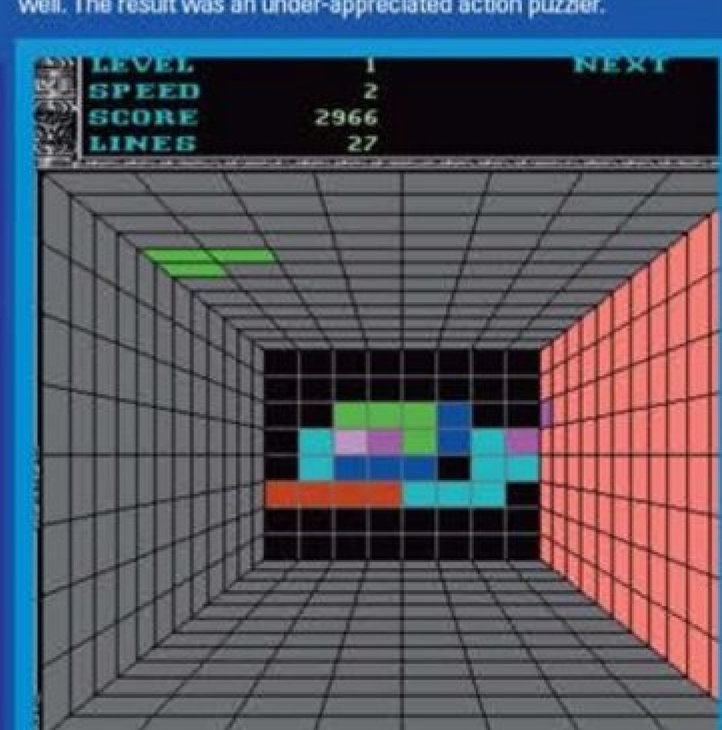
When you create one of the most famous games in the world, almost by mistake, what happens next? Craig Grannell talks to puzzle fanatic Alexey Pajitnov about what the Tetris creator did after his falling blocks invaded everyone's computers, consoles and dreams…



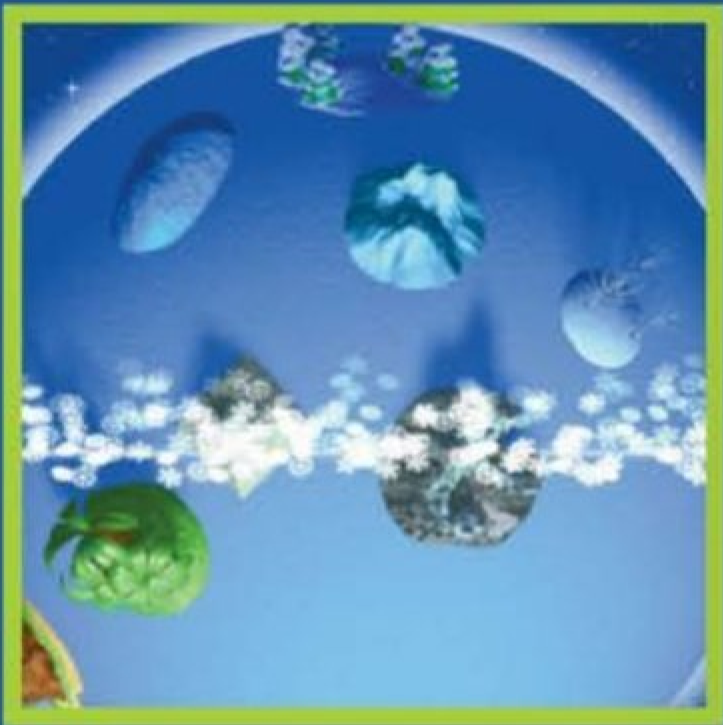
» [PC] *Welltris* took the basic idea of *Tetris* and wrapped it around a well. The result was an under-appreciated action puzzler.



» Alexey Pajitnov's original Electronika 60, on which he created the game that he'll forever be known for: *Tetris*.



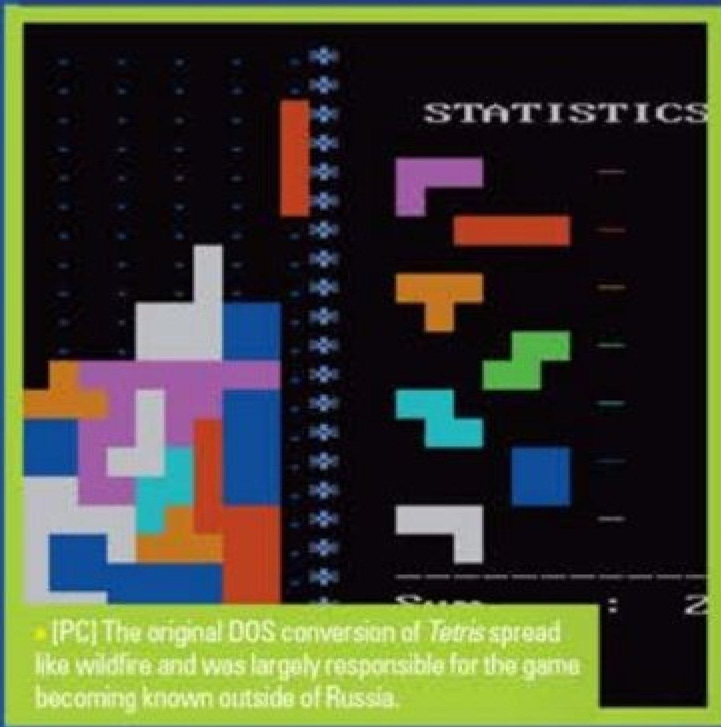








» [PC] At the beginning of *Dwice*, the world is frozen, making for some rather unhappy locals.



» [PC] The original DOS conversion of *Tetris* spread like wildfire and was largely responsible for the game becoming known outside of Russia.

There's a media phenomenon especially common in pop music: the one-hit wonder. An artist hits the sweet spot, with a song that almost seems infectious, and it spreads worldwide like a virus, playing incessantly on radios and in people's heads. But when a song becomes insanely famous, repeating the feat is nigh-on impossible, no matter how hard a creator tries. The same can be true of gaming, especially when you hit the high that Alexey Pajitnov did with *Tetris*.

We chronicled the gestation of *Tetris* in issue 40, and the tale of its trip to the Game Boy was told in issue 100. But we were keen to find out what happened next. How tricky was it for Alexey to follow up *Tetris* once it was clear just how insanely popular the game was, especially given that it would be over a decade until he received suitable compensation for his efforts?

Fortunately, *Tetris* wasn't Alexey's first game – it wasn't like he only had a single good idea to be used up in one go. In fact, a childhood fascination with puzzles and riddles had threaded through his technical education and to his employment in computer science. Then a workaholic, Alexey recalls living his life in the office, creating numerous games, ostensibly to test hardware. "I wrote several very small games for different kinds of processors and computers – really small, insignificant games – and I feel *Tetris* was just one of them," he says.

But *Tetris* nonetheless became a worldwide smash hit. From that point, did Alexey suddenly find it harder to think of new ideas and measure up to his classic game? "Yes, especially during those first few years. After I was done with *Tetris* and it became popular, I became kind of famous, and I decided to become a professional games designer," he recalls. "I had lots of small puzzle ideas and was excited to realise them. I started five or six games in a row, but every time I proposed a game, everyone looked at me and felt I needed to deliver another *Tetris*."

A crisis of confidence led to Alexey second-guessing himself and disliking concepts that suddenly felt weaker than *Tetris*, despite the block-based action-puzzler being merely another throwaway idea at the time it was created. Then, an epiphany: "I realised I had to bury myself under the circumstances and decide *Tetris* is a story I should forget about. I'd go ahead and begin as a young, unknown designer. I realised if you want something in this life, you must sometimes forget all your achievements and start from scratch."

That's not to say Alexey entirely broke from his past. Indeed, his first post-*Tetris* game released to market, *Welltris*, co-created with Andrei Sgenov, was clearly heavily influenced by his breakout hit. The point, though, was deciding he now "merely needed to love a game in order to do it – that was enough"; there would be "no prediction of success, and no comparisons." This approach worked, Alexey reckons, because although he admits to creating "a lot of bad games" (which, looking at his achievements, seems a harsh statement), he also designed "several good ones," and is very happy with his career.

But back to *Welltris*. "That was more of a *Tetris* sequel, and it came from everyone telling me the original was too simple and needed to be done in three dimensions," recalls Alexey. "But I immediately realised *Tetris* in two dimensions was hard for the

If you want something in this life, you must sometimes forget all your achievements



Career highlights

It's very easy to make assumptions about someone's career, not least when a hit propels a creator to fame. But when we ask about Alexey's career highlight, he pauses for a moment before stating *Pandora's Box*. "The thing is, the *Tetris* story is a great story, and if I'm famous it's because of that game. But a very big part of that story is luck," he explains. "The game was lucky. I was lucky to create the game at the beginning of my career. The stars helped at that moment. But *Pandora's Box* is something I started and finished with my own two hands – I created the concept, the entire game, and the entire product. I had great help from Microsoft, but I still felt there was more of my own effort in the game, from beginning to end."



human brain, and in 3D it could be a really boring, slow game, because you couldn't handle it." The solution was to mix a 3D effect with 2D gameplay, which resulted in the concept of a well and moving pieces around its four walls. Said walls would be locked if a piece couldn't entirely fit into the well. Although boasting more strategy than *Tetris*, *Welltris* received lukewarm reviews, which Alexey puts down to it being poorly executed. "*Welltris* was complicated and very attached to EGA-standard graphics, and it died with it. But it was still a good idea, and it survived a little bit longer as a multiplayer arcade machine in Japan."

After *Welltris*, Alexey is credited with *Wordtris*, *Faces* and *Hatris* – puzzle games with less abstract visuals. He says *Wordtris* was "not my concept at all", but stacking games *Faces* and *Hatris* were: "They were more or less the same concept, but a bit different in graphical implementation." There was also a brief foray into another genre, through shoot-'em up *Ice & Fire*, which Alexey candidly calls a "complete failure", adding: "I decided to never come back to that kind of action game, because it's not my area of expertise." Instead, Alexey returned to puzzles, working for Microsoft on more traditional fare than *Tetris*, evoking games he played as a child. First, there was *Microsoft Entertainment Pack: The Puzzle Collection*, a selection of small, original games bundled with PCs for years. Next, online project *Mind Aerobics* was devised for MSN: "I designed a dozen genres of puzzles, and every day we'd put several configurations on the website. It was ahead of its time – casual players weren't really there yet. But based on *Mind Aerobics*, I discovered a new genre in puzzles: the visual puzzle. Based on that, I did *Pandora's Box*, which I am proud of."

Alexey describes *Pandora's Box* as a set of non-logical puzzles. To solve them, you must use your feeling of colour, shape and positioning. "I worked on it for almost three years. The puzzles and concepts didn't take long to design, but I had to come up with the configurations, find pictures, cut them into parts, and make silhouettes. The game had almost 900 different puzzles, and I did the majority of them myself." In a sense, it was *Pandora's Box* that finally freed Alexey from the weight of expectation *Tetris* had brought with it: "*Pandora's Box* was a completely original game, and nothing like it had existed before. That was a big pressure, to come up with something that wasn't derivative."

The most recent Alexey titles, *Hexic* and *Dwice*, offered his take on the match genre. In *Hexic*'s case, hexagonal tiles are rotated to form like-coloured clusters; in *Dwice*, the aim is to match identical pairs of shapes as blocks fall down the screen. "*Dwice* was original in that you couldn't see it was directly derivative of anything. But when designing it, it was almost too obvious, and I worried it was derivative of something," says Alexey. "But it's the best concept for the 2D block puzzle games I've done a lot of, and it was very well implemented. I discovered during this period of my life the secret to a popular game is to get your developer to fall in love with it." This also happened with *Hexic*, which Alexey says the original developer adored. Gameplay-wise, however, Alexey admits *Hexic* was a rare example of him creating in reaction to another game: "I was really upset with *Bejeweled*. Such a great concept, and such a good idea, but so badly tuned. The original version was just miserable. I wanted to improve it, but it wasn't my game, so why should I care? [Laughs] But when I was asked to create an online game, I thought about something similar but better, and came up with *Hexic*."

It's clear although *Tetris* could have been Alexey's end; it was instead his beginning. He launched a career on the back of his love of puzzles, and got to create the games he was truly interested in. Despite the odd misstep, much of his work has a timeless quality once you



With abstract puzzles, it's possible to create something everyone will love

[PC] Somewhat naughtily branded by Spectrum Holobyte as *Faces...tris III*, *Faces* isn't one of Alexey's better games.





[PC] *Fringer*: a game where instead of tying yourself in knots, your aim is to do quite the reverse.



[PC] *Ice & Fire* saw Alexey bringing puzzle thinking to a *Doom*-like 3D shooter. It didn't end well.

Real-time strategist

Although we know about Alexey's own games and how they came to be, he's only really spoken about traditional puzzle games when it comes to what he plays himself, and so we were keen to find out more. "Because I was in the games industry, I could ignore some kinds of genres, but I tried them all, little by little. In games, like in movies, all genres are good except for the boring ones [laughs] and the best games in each genre are really great." In terms of specific titles, he says that today he is "very conservative with his choices", mostly playing games that in some way challenge the brain. "I was addicted to *Warcraft* and played for years – it was a great pleasure. And I very much like real-time strategy games. So today, I still love the old-old games – *Civilization, Tetris, Zuma* – and still visit *Warcraft* from time to time!"



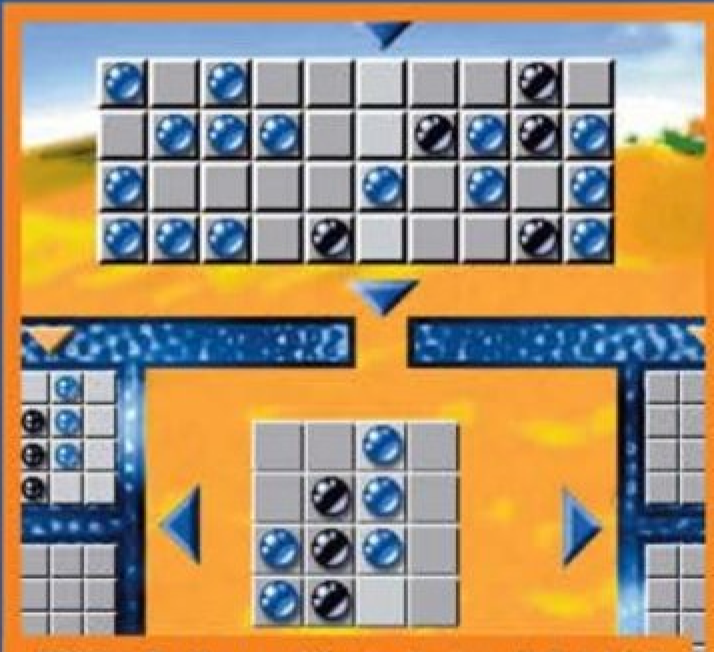
[PC] Alexey loves retro strategy games like the excellent *Civilization*.

look beyond the graphical limitations of the host hardware. "That's because puzzles are intellectual entertainment – a genre that really stimulates your brain," he thinks, adding he's a "brain-oriented person", hence getting pleasure out of making and solving puzzles. Other games, he reckons, have emotional connotations and are more socially oriented: "You need to make a character to please people, and this must appeal to a wide audience, despite people having such different preferences. Whatever you create, only a small percentage of the public will truly love it. But with abstract puzzles, it's possible to create something everyone will love, and they have an eternal life-span that bucks the typical industry sales-curve explosion. Mind you, no-one has any marketing budget for puzzles, so you have to start really slowly!"

An exception, as ever, is *Tetris*, which continues to invade practically every new format, although now he is largely retired, Alexey himself is no longer heavily involved with the franchise. However, we ask whether there's any chance of his other creations arriving for modern formats. On *Pandora's Box*, he believes "its time will come again – I still believe that," and we proffer that it could be a fantastic game on Nintendo handhelds or iOS devices.

"After retiring from Microsoft, I allowed myself to not really follow the industry, and I don't go on to the internet to look for something really hot. That's why I'm afraid to be just a little bit incompetent on answering this, because I don't really make efforts to follow it." But on being pressed about those more recent systems, he dismisses the various flavours of the Nintendo DS, largely due to it being "really hard to deal with Nintendo when you're a little bit out of the industry". On iOS, there's perhaps a little more hope: "I've tried several games on the iPad, and it's a very nice platform for puzzle games. The touchscreen gives you a good feeling of control over the game, but the downside is it's not as reliable as buttons… For most puzzles, it is not critical but that still must be taken into consideration…"

Whether we'll ever see *Pandora's Box* for the iPad remains to be seen. Alexey is a little cagey about his current efforts regarding creating games, noting that he "participates in several small projects" but reiterating that he doesn't work intensively, and adding that he nonetheless "perhaps has a few small ideas he wants to realise in the puzzle genre". In a sense, that sounds a lot like how Alexey's career began, tinkering on his own ideas, in his own time, at a computer lab in Russia (although now said tinkering is mostly done at his home in the USA). But this isn't a case of coming full circle and back to where he began so much as fortunately now being in the position to do what he truly loves, whenever he wishes. For Alexey, it seems, the puzzles will never end.



» [PC] *Finty Flush* has you shift strips of coloured balls to initially blank plates. It starts slowly but soon becomes akin to juggling.



» [PC] Here we are in the Cairo screen of *Pandora's Box*, offering the choice of several brain-bending puzzles.



» [PC] Travel round the world in *Pandora's Box*, having your brains smashed out with a brick.



» [PC] Alexey was a fan of the mechanics of *Bejeweled*, but not the execution. *Hexic* was his attempt to go one better.

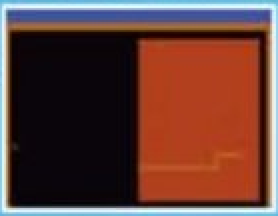
Notable puzzlers and more…

Auto Rally (Arcade, 1981)



Many early arcade machines, such as *Авторалли-М* (variously translated as *Auto Rally* and *Rally-M*) provided arcade fare akin to Japanese, US and European games. A Flash version of this and other classic Russian arcade games can be played online at 15kop.ru.

Antix (Elektronika 60/DOS, 1985)



If you're a Firebird aficionado, you'll get deja vu on playing *Antix*, because it's practically the same as *Zolyx* (i.e. *Qix* with bouncing balls instead of crazed sticks). *Antix* came first, in 1985, and was developed by *Tetris* co-creator Dmitry Pavlovsky, based on an even older title, *Xonix*.

Color Lines (DOS, 1992)



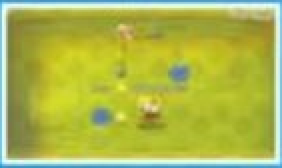
Oleg Demin's much-imitated 1992 PC game still has tributes and remakes being released today. The premise is simple: you may move one ball per turn, as long as there's a clear path to its destination. The aim: five in a row. The problem: three new balls every turn.

Shariki (DOS, 1994)



"Hang on," you might think on firing up *Shariki*, "this looks a bit familiar." And you'd be right. Eugene Alemzhin's forgotten PC title has practically identical mechanics to *Bejeweled*, although it's not as shiny, using basic coloured circles instead of shimmering jewels.

Cut The Rope (iOS, 2010)



ZeptoLab's game showcased how smash-hit puzzle games still emerge from Russia. In *Cut The Rope*, quick thinking is required to cut said ropes and get a candy into odd green creature Om Nom's maw. Rather like *Tetris*, the game has since found its way to a diverse range of platforms.

THE MAKING OF



KABLAMMO! Point Blank burst into arcades in 1994, determined to inject them with some quirky gameplay that was both family friendly and trigger happy. Sorrel Tilley apprehended designer Yutaka Kounoe to find out more. . .



Inexplicably titled *Gun Bullet* in Japan, *Point Blank* offered the unexpected. While most companies were building towards realism, Namco had other ideas. Yutaka Kounoe himself isn't a fan of gore. "I'm not sure it's morally right to make a living through ultra-violent games, but the development department were a little more flexible about designing them," he explains. "However, to make this game appeal to a wider demographic, we held back on the onscreen blood. I wanted to make *Point Blank* attractive to couples on dates, so I made sure there wasn't a drop of blood in any of the debris flying about. Even in *Tekken*, a game we created that allowed you to savour the exhilaration and satisfaction of decimating your opponent, we used CG effects that look like blood, but upon closer inspection, there really isn't any. Actually, the *Point Blank* prototype was a serious game with digitised photo graphics, in the style of *Lethal Enforcers*, but with Konami and Taito already having hits on the market, it was Namco's preference (and mine) to take on a new challenge. We decided to make a wacky, comical mini-game collection. The finance department didn't see the value in it and said it was no good, but we were determined to work day and night to create a fun game."

Kounoe had just finished working on the rail shooter *Lucky & Wild*, which used a fixed-position light gun. The first challenge in *Point Blank*'s development therefore would be the creation of an all-new, wired gun. "The recoil was the biggest problem in the gun's development. The concept was born out of an obsession of my boss, Shigeki Tohyama, who was Namco's resident Doc Brown character. Tohyama was a very unique individual, always beavering away on a strange invention.

"The electronics team carried out repeated experiments with the recoil gun under Tohyama's direction, but these guys were nearly in tears with frustration – 'We can't get the recoil

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE, PLAYSTATION
- » **GENRE:** LIGHT GUN SHOOTER



» [Arcade] *Point Blank* also featured a *Street Fighter II*-style trash-the-sports-car bonus stage.

we need!', 'The product's gonna be no good!' We had stressed the importance of blow back, but the components couldn't deliver a high enough voltage, so the kick was disappointing. Luckily, Tohyama was an adaptable boss with far-reaching knowledge and construction skills, and inventing was his forte, so he said 'Why not try increasing the voltage only at the precise moment you activate the solenoid?'" For readers without degrees in electronic engineering, a solenoid is a coil of wire which converts electrical energy into hydraulic motion – in other words, the perfect component for a gun recoil mechanism. "With Tohyama's hint, the team succeeded in achieving the powerful kick we were looking for." Kounoe also let slip that during his time at Namco, he filed for a patent on an innovative reloading mechanism using the base of the gun. If you've ever seen an action movie, you will surely be aware that handguns are commonly reloaded by sliding a magazine into a hole at the bottom of the grip. Dreams of re-enacting scenes from *Bad Boys* were sadly dashed, though. "Games with this feature would have been more unique and realistic, but it was never used, since I didn't throw myself into any other gun games after *Point Blank*."

"There's one more interesting thing about the GunCon's development," Kounoe adds. "It could read the screen coordinates to within a single pixel without failure, thanks to the tenacity of Namco's employees. With such perfect accuracy, we were able to create our finely tuned level designs. However, when the cabinets were about to be shipped from the factory, they discovered a minute error in the guns' initial settings. So right at the end of development, I had to oversee the production of a manual on how to recalibrate the gun sights! When you're working on a groundbreaking new product, things can happen that no one is prepared for. An important lesson!"

Kounoe was no stranger to hard work. Most projects he was involved with at Namco required long hours and sleepless nights. "When I was making *Point Blank*, I entered the data for every stage all alone and by myself. This data included enemy frequency and location, probabilities, and so on. All stages, multiplied by the four difficulty levels, multiplied by the two player modes, made lots of categories for fine tuning, and the development server we had at that time was slow. So every morning at 3am I would ride my bike to Namco and work on data alone in the dark office. In the early hours when the place was deserted, I had the server all to myself and I could use it with more efficiency, but I was working in the shadows, thinking 'Is a ghost gonna appear any minute now?' I jumped out of my skin when the bosses arrived at 7am and tapped me on the shoulder! It's a good memory though, putting all my effort into creating one game."

Despite his own herculean efforts, Kounoe still attributes much of *Point Blank*'s success to teamwork. "One of the reasons it's so perfectly tuned and patiently made is that when it was in production, all kinds of people on breaks from other projects would drop by to try it out. Even now I feel overjoyed that I finished development of a hit game safely – and no ghosts appeared!"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DIG DUG
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1982

LUCKY & WILD (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1992

TEKKEN
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1994

DOCTOR, DOCTOR…

"AT THE BEGINNING of the project we planned ideas by making simple one-page pencil drawings. We had about 60 of these idea sheets lined up so we could consider the variety. On one of them I had written 'Save the old geezer', and that was the start of Dr Don and Dr Dan. They became mascot characters and ended up being painted on the side of the cabinets. The characters' look was decided by gathering ideas from all the designers on the project and holding a contest. I made a rough sketch just to show them my initial ideas for the characters – one round, the other tall and thin. It must have made quite an impression on them, because all of the submitted mascot candidates were almost identical to my original sketch! I wanted them to look like sombrero-wearing Mexican brothers, but the final design was kind of 'safe' – a *Sesame Street*-type odd couple."




» Ninjas can be deadly. Even cardboard ones.



» [Arcade] I was stung by a bee once. Twenty quid for a jar of honey!



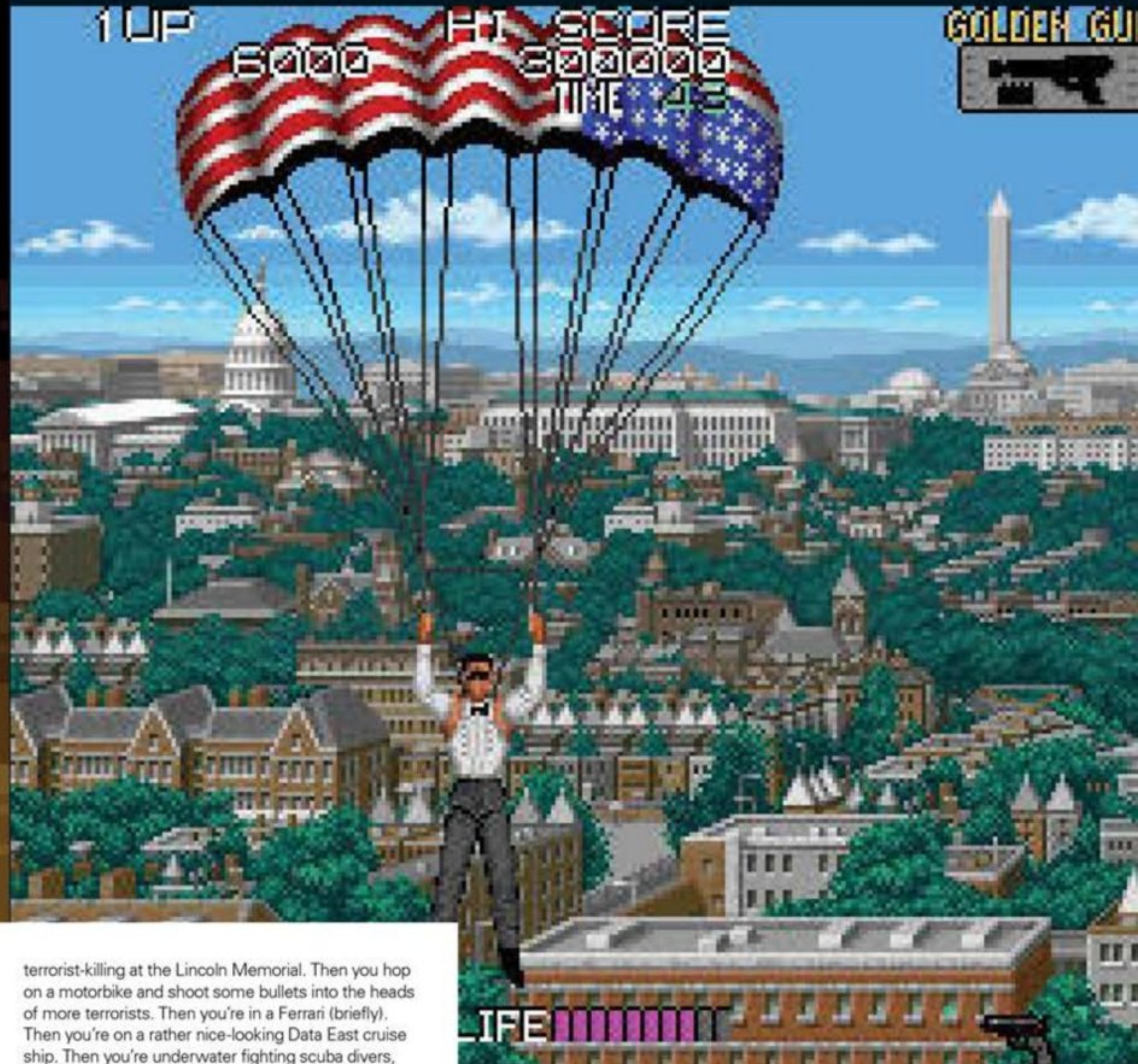
» [Arcade] The octopus stage was apparently very popular with the ladies. Nobody knows why.



» [Arcade] Don't count your chickens before you frag them. Seriously, there's no time.


1UP
22600
HI SCORE
300000
TIME 47
BULLETS 198
1·LIFE
ENEMY





Sly Spy

THE SPY WHO CLONED ME

» RETROREVIVAL

» ARCADE
» DATA EAST
» 1989

In the cheeky act of unlicensed licence-borrowing for your videogame, you could pretty much get away with murder back in the early days. Take *Sly Spy*, for instance. It's *James Bond* in all but name, and stars a bow tie and frilly-front-shirted secret agent on a mission to rescue the US and its president from a terrorist organisation.

A run-and-gunner of similar style to Data East's earlier releases *DragonNinja* and *RoboCop*, *Sly Spy* is basically a series of *James Bond*-inspired levels with bosses that ape familiar *Bond* villains Jaws and Odd Job. Moreover, parts of a golden gun can also be collected that give temporary access to a powerful gun capable of killing enemies in one shot.

You start your mission by jumping out of an aeroplane, and on your descent have to shoot goofy terrorists who are trying to touch down on US soil and launch a stolen nuclear warhead. Once you've parachuted into Washington, DC, you get to do some terrorist-killing at the Lincoln Memorial. Then you hop on a motorbike and shoot some bullets into the heads of more terrorists. Then you're in a Ferrari (briefly). Then you're on a rather nice-looking Data East cruise ship. Then you're underwater fighting scuba divers, great white sharks and a guy in a diving suit. And then there's a section where you have to fight Sean Connery, George Lazenby and Roger Moore in a pit of anacondas. Well, that last bit we might have made up, but the point still stands that *Sly Spy* throws every spy cliché at the screen. It's just a shame the action feels about as awkward and corny as a Roger Moore karate chop.

Indeed, time has certainly not been kind to *Sly Spy*. The levels are oddly arranged, short and feel like a platformer. Your spy looks and moves like a waiter, cannot fire upwards, despite the fact enemies regularly appear on platforms above him, and dodging enemies and bullets proves a real challenge too. The game also reuses bosses, and the range of weapons and attacks on offer feel limited too. But although *Sly Spy* doesn't quite reach the polished heights of say *Rolling Thunder*, it will certainly hold entertainment value for *Bond* fans, that's for sure. *





FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Cascade Games

Were you left traumatised by Cassette 50? Thrilled by Air Combat Emulator? Or petrified by the devilish Frightmare? If so, read on as Graeme Mason chats to the men responsible from Harrogate-based Cascade Games…

The Eighties was a turbulent decade for videogames. Simultaneously an exciting yet stressful time for those involved; many software houses rose and fell in this period. One of them was Cascade Games, founded by Guy Wilhelmy and Nigel Stevens.

"I was studying Physics at Loughborough University in the late Seventies," begins Guy Wilhelmy, "but I became mesmerised by computers and it was obvious that software was going to play a big part in my future." Guy had already begun programming, writing various horse racing and gambling odds programs on the university's interactive mainframe computers. While gathering data for his software, he noticed something. "I saw that most people using the mainframe were playing games rather than studying. I guess a light went on somewhere in my mind!"

At the same university, studying Human Biology, was Nigel Stevens. The two men quickly discovered they had common interests in gambling and computing. Nigel and Guy soon forgot their studies as they brainstormed moneymaking ideas, and it wasn't long before they were devising a whole suite of programs to try and interpret various gambling strategies, ostensibly by attempting a primitive type of artificial intelligence. "In the human anatomy lab we had a PDP-11 computer," recalls Nigel, "and I could gain access to it during the night. So Guy and I would sit there in the darkness punctuated only by the occasional beam of flashlight from a security guard. I don't think Guy quite realised at the time what was in the freezers that surrounded us!"

INSTANT EXPERT

Cascade Games Ltd founders Guy Wilhelmy and Nigel Stevens met at Loughborough University

***Cassette 50* was** originally sold by both of them from their homes

***Cassette 50*'s notorious** reputation has since given rise to several annual homebrew Crap Games Competitions

The key to its success was not only mail order sales, but bulk deals to retailers and distributors as a "pack-in" title for new computers

Cascade utilised the infamous Lenslok for the release of *ACE*. The game was also unusual (for the time) thanks to its huge plastic box

***ACE* originated on** the C16 and Vic-20, and was even released on the hapless Commodore Plus/4 before the C64 version finally appeared in 1985

The Clint Eastwood movie *Firefox* influenced several elements in ACE, most notably the inclusion of a rear-view camera and the aircraft's speech, as voiced by Nigel Stevens

The *Breakout*-inspired Traz came with a fully-functional construction program. Its name stood for TRansformable Arcade Zone

The Cascade budget label was the less-than-successful Gamebusters

First Steps

Post-graduation, the pressure of finding jobs meant Guy and Nigel only kept in contact sporadically. With Nigel finding employment as a local government programmer, Guy was managing to scrape a living with his first software company, Databank Software Services, developing and selling business and betting programs on computers such as the Apple II, Commodore Pet and Exidy Sorcerer. "After my finals it had been a simple choice between gambling and computer games," explains Guy, "and with the latter being more fresh and exciting, ultimately it was an easy choice." Operating out of a run-down house in Loughborough, he programmed, designed adverts, wrote copy for magazines and sent out thousands of mailshots, working night and day to try and establish a profitable business.

Yet, despite help from Nigel and his father (who was reciprocating work Guy had done in setting up his father's factory in London a few years earlier), Guy became disillusioned with the software industry, and began training to be a teacher in 1981 before embarking on a career-defining trip to America. He says: "While in the US, I saw what was happening with software and games and that really got my enthusiasm going again." On his return to the UK in 1982, Guy moved to Harrogate



“I needed something so far out there that no-one else would dare to compete”

GUY WILHELMY ON THE GENESIS OF CASSETTE 50

to complete his teaching probationary year and began a new company based on his middle name: Ulrich Technical Services – or UTS. The beginning of UTS coincided with the launch of the ZX Spectrum so, together with the Apple II, Guy concentrated on these two formats as he considered UTS' first move.

This first move would sculpt his and, eventually, Nigel Stevens' early careers, as Guy explains. "It had always annoyed me that when I was writing single games back in the late Seventies, a five- or ten-minute cassette was nearly the same price as a 45-minute one. I therefore always used full-length cassettes and then had the idea of putting more and more games onto each cassette to use up the extra tape. I needed a USP, something so far out there that no-one else would dare to compete, and this seemed to fit the bill perfectly." This was the technical beginning of what would become *Cassette 50*, and Guy was shortly busy creating the many games that would make up the Apple version of the compilation from his home in Harrogate. When he contacted his friend about his new venture, Nigel Stevens wasn't convinced – but this time Guy was determined to make it work, despite the return of late night programming sessions, now in addition to a regular day job.

Eventually Nigel would see the potential and contributed by providing additional computers and programming. "I saw no real advantage in keeping everything to myself," says Guy generously, "and considered it useful to have someone to bounce ideas off." Guy created the necessary hardware and software to allow the Apple II games to be easily ported to other computers and permitted Nigel to use his existing adverts and masters and sell *Cassette 50* from his own home in South Wales. "The logic was, that if the public saw two companies selling the same thing, perhaps it would give it more credibility," says Guy, "and if one didn't pick up an order then the other might."

What Guy didn't anticipate was Nigel's home address proving much more attractive to customers than his PO box which had been forced upon him by mortgage constraints; the name of the Stevens family home was Cascades. "It had been a massive risk initially," states Guy, "I'd designed the first adverts and found a graphic artist to convert my ideas. It was a huge business gamble and a frightening step as I'd booked over £2000 worth of advertising." The risk paid off as sales of *Cassette 50* – bolstered by an enthusiastic advertising campaign – rocketed.

Cascade Calling

By 1983, it was clear to the two friends that they needed to form a proper limited company. Nigel remembers: "I was earning more in a month from the software than I was in an entire year in my regular job. It was obvious that there was a lot of potential in the market and that we could do really well out of it." When it came to the newly formed company's name, it was apt to use the name of the Stevens family home that had served the early versions of *Cassette 50* so well. "Then Nigel and I flipped a coin ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

19.9p per game on *Cassette 50*, not to mention the free calculator watch!

2088 Second *ACE* sequel took to outer space and the year 2088

11 *Cassette 50* was released on 11 different formats from the Apple II to ZX81

£1,000,000 Cascade's estimated turnover when it was at its peak

£10 the amount Damon Redmond received from Cascade for his Atari 400/800 game *Rabbit Raid* in 1984

40% of sales of *Cassette 50* estimated via mail order including one all the way from Madagascar

£40,000 Cascade's approximate development cost for *ACE*

£250,000 estimated spent on advertising, per year, when Cascade was at its peak in the mid-Eighties



»[C64] *19: Boot Camp* featured several distinct games.


»[C64] Taking *ACE* into outer space seemed an inevitable move but the game didn't translate so well to the year 2088.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Guy Wilhelmy
Guy left Cascade in June 1987, selling his share to partner Nigel Stevens. He rediscovered his love of green energy and today is a self-styled inventor, working on ways to recycle machinery and metal to make heating systems and generators. Guy recently installed into his own house a fully automatic custom central heating unit that runs on woodchips – a third of the cost of oil and environmentally friendlier. Upon leaving he formed The Game Creators Ltd, specialising in game-making tools and software. Responsible for several successful brands such as Dark Basic, their latest innovation (www.freedom-engine.com) allows developers to code within a browser.



Tony Warriner
In 1990, Tony reunited with Charles Cecil with whom he had worked with at Artic Computing in the early Eighties. Together with David Sykes and Noirin Carmody they formed Revolution Software, where Tony still is today.

Sean Conran
After a spell at Vektor Grafix, Sean left the videogame industry in 1996 and today works in web development.



Rick Vanner
After Cascade, Rick worked at Europress Software for 15 years.

Nigel Stevens
After Artronic, Nigel did an MSc and became involved in product development, including the design of a virtual pen with his new company Tracklink that could be used to represent physical action on a screen in a manner similar to the Nintendo Wii. Today he is still involved in the R&D of medical devices, patenting and other projects of interest.

Ian Martin
Ian joined developer Vektor Grafix in 1988 before creating The Software Refinery with Ciaran Gultnieks and Mark Griffiths. There he developed several PC games including the cult classic space adventure *HardWar*. However, he left the games industry behind in 2002.

Damon Redmond
Since leaving Cascade in 1988, Damon has enjoyed a glittering career as a videogame developer and artist working at companies such as Codemasters, Electronic Arts and Activision. Nowadays he lectures at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco on the history and design of videogames.

to decide who would be chairman and who would be secretary," laughs Guy. With offices established above a Volvo dealership in Harrogate and Nigel Stevens swiftly relocating from South Wales, this was the real start of Cascade Games Limited. In 1984 they hired their first programmer, Ian Martin, quickly followed by Damon Redmond and Rick Vanner.

"I think I was just 15 when I started at Cascade and worked mainly on making new versions of the games on *Cassette 50* for the Atari 8-bit format," says Rick, "and I was at least able to make the games more interesting by making use of the graphics and sound on the Atari." The young man was impressed by Guy Wilhelmy and his dedication. "I was amazed by the original idea of 50 games on one cassette and how Guy did all the development work to make it on multiple platforms. For example, the Atari conversion was done by making the Apple II send keyboard commands to the Atari and it would type the game out!" Unfortunately for Rick, his employment at Cascade did not last long. "I stupidly showed a copy of a game to a friend and word got back to the team," he grimaces, "and I got sacked for my trouble. I learned an important lesson that day, which was hard to take at the time, but I moved on, went to college, and never made that mistake again."

Damon Redmond had already crossed paths with Cascade; his game *Rabbit Raid* on the Atari 8-bit computers had been bought by Guy Wilhelmy for the princely sum of £10 before being deposited on the ill-fated *Cassette 50* follow-up, *Cassette 4*. Shortly afterwards, Damon found himself ensconced in Cascade's offices, busy converting *Cassette 50* games to new formats. "I worked on the Atari, Amstrad, Spectrum and Commodore 64 versions," admits Damon, "but it's no secret they were all rubbish!" Yet despite his dismissive assessment of the compilation, Damon has fond memories of it. "Personally I have a soft spot for *Cassette 50*. It was my first real entry into a 28-year career in the videogames industry."

In the meantime, Guy Wilhelmy was still busy writing games and had coded a Commodore 64 title called *3D-Beee*. "It was a dog," he says candidly, "as although it was in machine code, I couldn't give it the attention it needed to exploit the superb sound capability of the C64 and the things I wanted to do with the graphics." The Cascade co-boss was caught in a situation common to many of the early software pioneers. "There simply wasn't enough time to run a company and program," he continues, "so I decided my programming days were behind me."

Guy focused his attention on another aggressive advertising campaign for *Cassette 50*. "I noticed children, and boys in particular, were obsessed with the concept of calculator watches," he says, "so another light came on in my head. I used a spread-sheet for the first time and we made a big decision: if sales were good enough we could give away one of these calculator watches with every copy of *Cassette 50*." The free calculator watch was an immense gamble for Cascade but one that paid off handsomely as *Cassette 50*'s sales shot up once more. And it was soon to put the funds to good use.

Emulating Air Combat

"I had a pilot's licence and knew how aircraft responded to controls and how the horizon should move," declares Guy, "but was also acutely aware of how slow the flying simulations of the time were. Technically correct, I'm sure, but they bored me to death!" Guy and Nigel's plan was to create a flying game with a rapidly moving horizon and as the idea developed they incorporated as many military aspects as they could. Fortunately Ian Martin, with assistance from Damon Redmond – who had now graduated to graphics artist – was able to brilliantly bring their ideas to life; in

TIMELINE

1977 – GUY WILHELMY AND NIGEL STEVENS MEET FOR THE FIRST TIME WHILE AT UNIVERSITY

1982 – GUY WILHELMY BEGINS PROGRAMMING AT HOME SOME OF THE GAMES THAT WOULD EVENTUALLY APPEAR ON *CASSETTE 50*. BOTH HE AND NIGEL STEVENS START SELLING THE COMPILATION FROM THEIR RESPECTIVE HOMES

1983 – CASCADE SOFTWARE LTD IS OFFICIALLY FORMED BY GUY AND NIGEL

1984 – CASCADE EXPANDS SLOWLY, BUILDING ON THE SUCCESS OF *CASSETTE 50*, ESPECIALLY AS A PACK-IN TITLE. IT BEGINS TO HIRE PROGRAMMERS SUCH AS IAN MARTIN AND DAMON REDMOND AND DEVELOPMENT OF ITS FIRST PREMIUM TITLE BEGINS

1985 – CASCADE RELEASES *ACE* ON THE COMMODORE 64 AND IT BECOMES ITS MOST SUCCESSFUL SINGLE TITLE BY FAR. TWO SEQUELS FOLLOW

1987 – THE AUTUMN MONTHS SEE SEAN CONRAN JOINING CASCADE AFTER RE-LOCATING FROM HERTFORDSHIRE. VEKTOR GRAFIX IS FORMED BY ANDY CRAVEN AND DANNY GALLAGHER WITH ASSISTANCE FROM NIGEL STEVENS AND CASCADE. IRONICALLY, THE DEVELOPER WOULD SOON TEMPT CASCADE'S *ACE* CODER IAN MARTIN TO JOIN THEM

1988 – TONY WARRINER JOINS AND BEGINS WORK ON THE SPECTRUM VERSION OF *19: BOOT CAMP*. THE GAME IS RELEASED LATER IN THE YEAR

1989 – CASCADE RELEASE ITS FINAL FEW GAMES BEFORE BECOMING ARTRONIC

1990 – ARTRONIC IS FOLDED BY NIGEL STEVENS AFTER A HANDFUL OF RELEASES

1985, *ACE* (which stood for Air Combat Emulator) was released to an eager public who lapped up its high-octane action and made the game a stunning success. And it was all because of *Cassette 50*, which was still consistently selling in the background as Cascade diversified into bigger and more complex projects.

"We were all very excited about *ACE*," says Nigel, "and both Guy and I had a strong interest in flight — he had the pilot's licence, while my father had been in the RAF — so it was like a natural progression for us. We wanted to do a flight simulation that not only had a real feel to it, but also the excitement of combat flying. It was really about keeping the game pacey, and to make players almost feel they were on a theme-park ride rather than sitting at home playing a computer game." Guy adds: "*ACE* is the game I recall most fondly; it was a true beginning, middle and end project; yet without *Cassette 50* as a 'cash-cow' it would never have existed."

Cascade pulled out all the stops to promote their triple-A title. "We made promotional videos in London before a big launch at the Royal Garden Hotel where we rented the entire upper foyer," says Guy proudly, "and we hired Raymond Baxter from *Tomorrow's World* to speak on behalf of the game." And, ironically, Ian Martin had delivered an excellent arcade action sim despite never having been in an aeroplane before. "Sometime later we flew from Leeds Bradford Airport LBA down to Heathrow for a meeting," smiles Nigel, "and on the flight back there was apparently a spot of trouble with one of the engines and we had a hell of a landing at LBA. I always remember Ian pointing out of the window as we were landing and saying to me, 'Err, Nigel, is it normal for a fire engine to be racing alongside the aircraft like that?' Fortunately it had just been a precaution." Writing a review of his own game on the Lemon 64 site in 2008, Ian Martin said: "I was given a lot of creative freedom and driven by one of the directors to add more and more and used a character screen to get a high speed. We never pitched [*ACE*] as a flight sim; fun was the order of the day." Cascade Games was booming; a turnover of £1 million plus was reported.

"Not a lot in today's terms," laughs Guy, "but not bad for back then!"

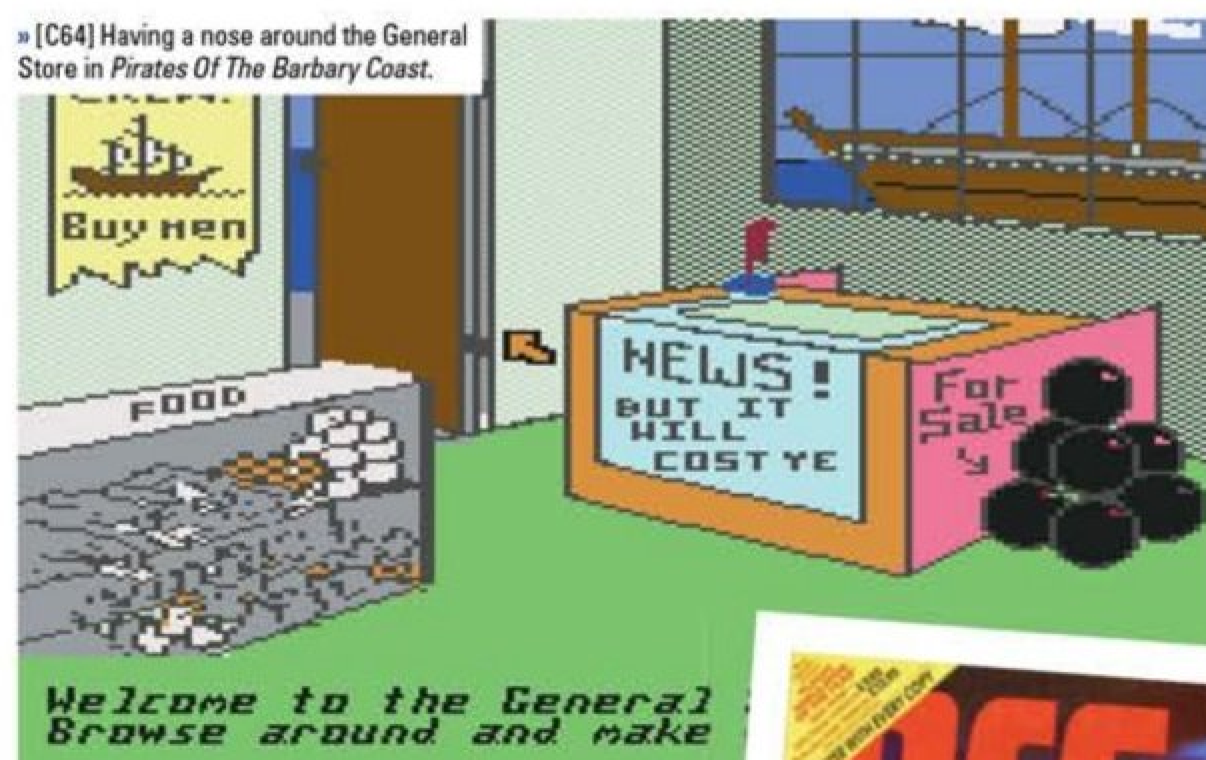
Separate Ways

Yet, despite the success of *ACE*, its inevitable sequel and the Nigel Stevens-designed shooter *Sky Runner*, Guy Wilhelmy was unsettled. "By the summer of 1987 I felt that I needed something different. I thought the market was repeating itself and it was time for me to move on. On a superficial level I suppose I'd achieved my objectives." Weary of the way the software business had become so ruthless in such a relatively short time and of the critical financial decisions he was making every day, Guy wanted a return to the simpler, earlier days of Cascade. "I gave Nigel a choice of either buying me out or letting me buy him out," he states matter-of-factly, "and he chose the former. We agreed a price and that was it. Three months later I was out of the software business." Cascade was now in the sole hands of Nigel Stevens. "The simplest option was a clean break," says Nigel, "so that's what we did."

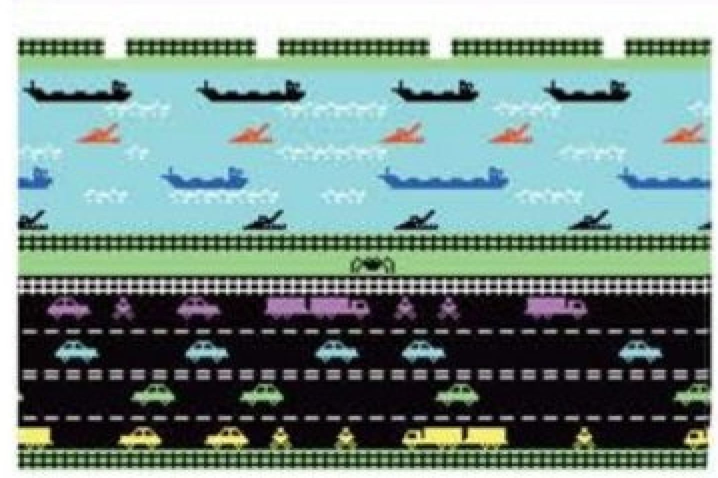
By now, a considerable team had been assembled at Harrogate. Programmers Paul Laidlaw, Andrew Tuley and Joe Booth were on board as were graphics whiz Jon Cassels and Sean Conran. "My job title was 'games producer'," explains Sean guardedly, "which I presumed put me slightly above programmer or artist roles, although I did end up doing some graphics and FX programming." Sean had relocated from Hertfordshire to join Cascade; his role was created by Nigel Stevens to try and smooth over the divide between management and development. "I'm not sure what the rest of the team thought of this southerner turning up as game producer," laughs Sean, "as up until that point I think everyone had just chipped in together. I surmised that part of my role was to keep an eye on quality and attention to detail and to be a link between the creatives and management." Despite the upheaval of Guy Wilhelmy leaving, spirits were still high at Cascade as new and exciting projects waited. "We were a gang of early 20-somethings having a laugh and programming games," continues Sean, "and it was a good bunch. Plenty of banter ▶

"We were all very excited about ACE"

NIGEL STEVENS ON CASCADE'S FANTASTIC FLIGHT SIM SHOOTER



» [C64] Having a nose around the General Store in *Pirates Of The Barbary Coast*.





REMAKING CASSETTE 50 – THE BLITZ 50



When Spectrum fan Andrew Cranham (aka PJ) forked out ten quid for the original *Cassette 50* back in 1983, he could have scarcely imagined that one day he would be programming a tribute remake. "There was an advert that caught my eye – 50 games for less than a tenner? Less than 20p a game! It had to be a bargain, right?" Wrong. And Andrew, as an early purchaser of the infamous compilation, didn't even have the solace of a free calculator watch. But what of the games themselves?

"I've tried to erase them from my memory, every last one. It's taken years of therapy but I got there in the end." So, we ask, why remake it? "On the Retro Remakes website we were deliberately making crap games, so, determined that no-one would 'out-crap' me, I set myself a challenge to write at least one crap game an evening." Despite the challenge, Andrew could not find it within himself to actually replay any of the games from *Cassette 50*; his compilation, *Blitz 50*, became a spiritual remake of Cascade's original, boasting such wonderful titles as *Open Plan Pacman* and *A-maze-ing*. "I think I made some of them too good," he whispers conspiratorially, "one or two of them you might actually want to play for longer than 30 seconds!" Check out all of Andrew's remakes at www.peejays-remakes.co.uk



»[Amiga] Artronic released strategy game Breach.

SIX OF THE BEST



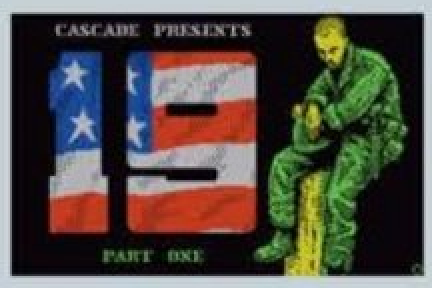
ACE (Commodore 64) (1985)
Jumping into the cockpit of an AWAT class fighter aircraft, *ACE* saw the player take on a foreign fleet. Designed by Nigel Stevens and Guy Wilhelmy and brilliantly coded by Ian Martin, it was a high-class simulation with a large dollop of shooting action.



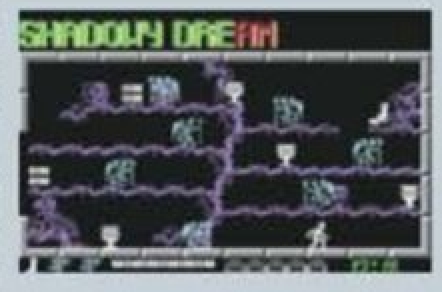
ACE 2 (Commodore 64) (1987)
It was inevitable that Cascade would capitalise on their success with the original game. The result was a superior dogfight game that appealed to a much broader range of player, although hardcore simulation fans were left disappointed.



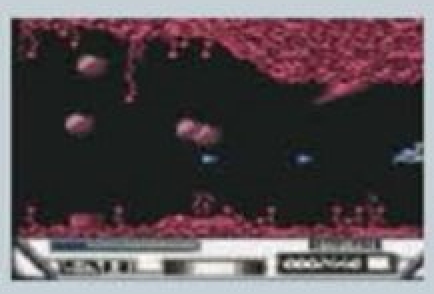
Traz (Commodore 64) (1988)
Taking the *Breakout* formula as tweaked by the arcade classic *Arkanoid*, *Traz* added a number of interesting elements (simultaneous bats on different edges, path choices) to create a polished and absorbing game.



19: Boot Camp (Spectrum) (1988)
Licensed from the Paul Hardcastle song, *19: Boot Camp* was a multi-stage game. The aim was to guide your potential recruit through several stages, including an assault course, shooting range and more before flying off to Vietnam.



Frightmare (Commodore 64) (1988)
Despite some poor reviews, *Frightmare* was a strange horror-themed platform game that featured an eerie atmosphere and some strange hypnotic music from Jeroen Kimmel. More curiosity than classic, but definitely worth experiencing.



DNA Warrior (Commodore 64) (1989)
The C64 was awash with shooters of all description by 1989, and while not particularly groundbreaking, horizontal-scroller *DNA Warrior* was attractive and playable enough to garner favourable reviews and reasonable sales.

THREE TO AVOID



3D-Beee (Commodore 64) (1984)
Brazenly claiming some sort of 3D effect in its title despite a conspicuous lack thereof, *3D-Beee* was a simplistic *Choplifter* clone without a semblance of that arcade classic's playability. Written by an under-pressure Guy Wilhelmy who himself admits the game was "a dog".



Traz (Spectrum) (1989)
Limping onto the Spectrum a year after its Commodore 64 release, *Traz* only got a budget release. The game translated poorly to the Sinclair machine and appeared to be programmed more as an afterthought, with sluggish controls and an annoying colour palette.



Penalty Soccer (C64/Spectrum) (1990)
Another budget release from label Gamebusters and with Cascade keen to release a football game of pretty much any description, this poorly conceived and painfully simple effort was a waste even of £2.99.

and mickey-taking, of course, but largely we were left to our own devices and got paid for what we would be doing anyway – being creative with computers." Damon Redmond agrees. "I look back at my time at Cascade with very fond memories. It was a great learning experience with many lessons that I still carry with me today."



»[ZX81] Dave's original handwritten layout for the original ZX81 version of *Fighter Pilot*.

Bad Times Coming

Cascade's next big title was based around the famous Paul Hardcastle song *19*, and may seem an odd step today; but in 1987, the Vietnam War was proving very topical. The movie *Platoon* had been a hit, as had Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* and the success of these films had already inspired games such as Konami's *Combat School*. To Cascade operations manager John Lewis, it seemed an opportune moment to combine the chart-topper with a multi-level game in the mould of classics such as *Track And Field*, albeit with a military twist. "*19* was a big project and elements of the game came from all over the place," says Nigel. Responsible for the Spectrum version was Paul Laidlaw who had previously squeezed *ACE* into the 48k computer.

"*ACE* had been a real learning curve for Paul," frowns Nigel, "and I think maybe I pushed him too hard for that and Paul did get quite stressed, but unfortunately it was a pressured environment. Although ultimately he did rise to the challenge." Paul Laidlaw's experience on *ACE* helped him provide an excellent version of *19: Boot Camp* for the ZX Spectrum, achieving a Crash Smash in August of 1988. Yet despite the programming of *19* being handled in-house, the rising cost of game development was beginning to hinder Cascade just as it was virtually every other developer. Additionally, the game was supposed to be the first in a four-game distribution deal with publisher Activision.

When the US company filed for chapter 11, Cascade was suddenly left exposed. It marked the beginning of the end. "I recognised that the company was seriously undercapitalised," says Nigel, "as by 1989 we were struggling quite badly. We needed capital to invest in 16-bit games." Poor-selling games such as *Implosion* and *Frightmare*, coupled with the collapse of the Activision deal, had taken their toll.

"I took on a new partner," continues Nigel, "and we created the Artronic Group that allowed us to expand into new areas apart from the games." In addition to software, the group would include a media side, as well as fulfilling Nigel's desire to expand into electronics and product development and for a short period he felt the company could continue and establish itself based around these varied products.

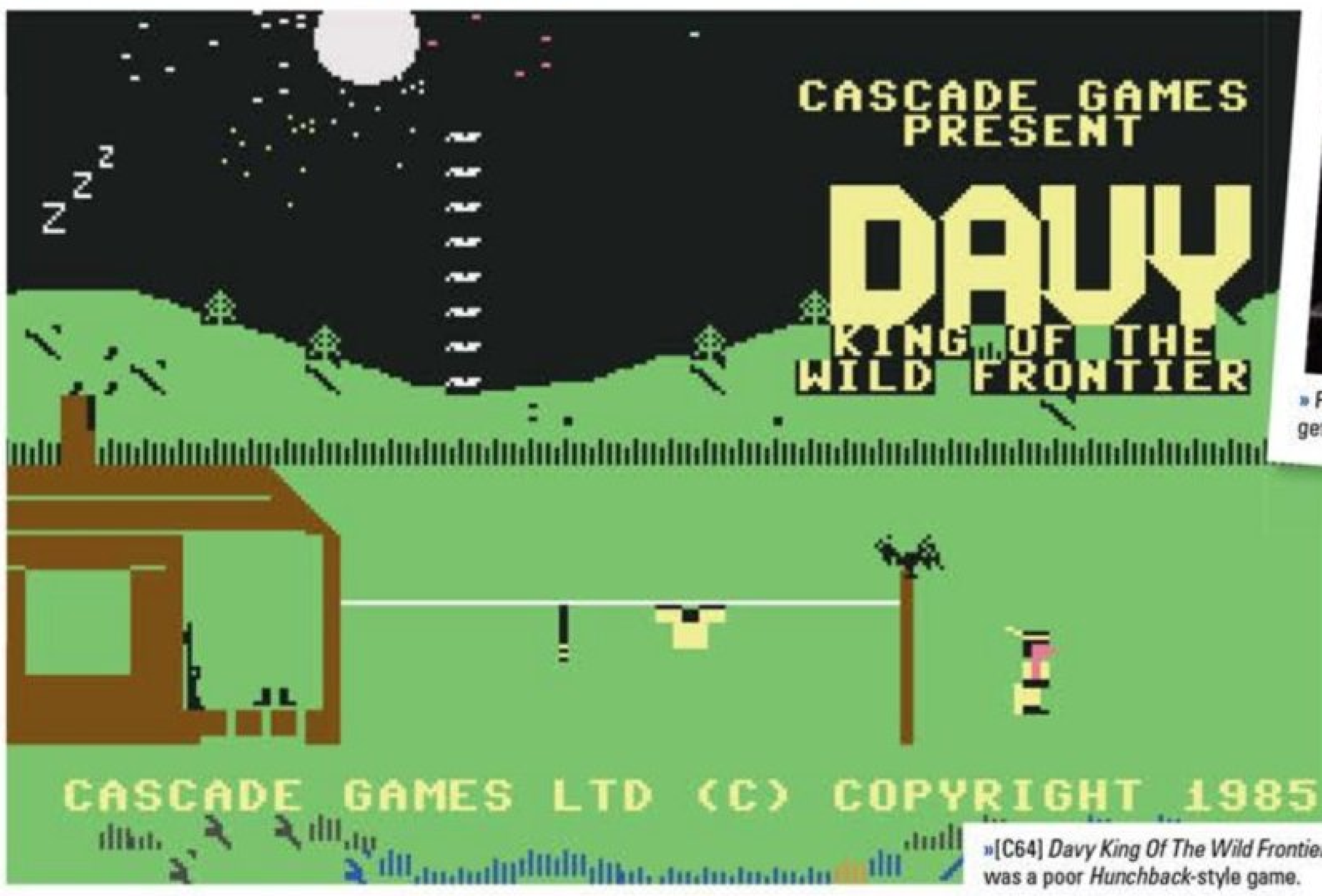
Nigel's optimism continued until a fateful visit one day to Electronic Arts' UK offices. Under development there was the first instalment of the *PGA Tour* series of golf games that would help to establish EA as a major videogame publisher. It was a game that boasted an impressive and much-touted budget of $1 million. "I remember thinking, what are we doing?" grimaces Nigel, "as I realised we just couldn't compete. I knew then that with rising costs and competition like this, the writing was on the wall for Artronic as a videogame publisher." In 1990, Nigel Stevens made a difficult decision, albeit one he felt was made for him by market forces.

> **"It was a great learning experience with many lessons that I still carry with me today"**
> DAMON REDMOND ON WORKING WITHIN THE CASCADE DEVELOPMENT TEAM



»[Amiga] Run-and-gunner *Soldier 2000* was one of Artronic's final releases


» Programmer Rick Vanner is evidently very pleased to get his hands on a brand new ZX81.



»[C64] *Davy King Of The Wild Frontier* was a poor *Hunchback*-style game.



Don't Look Back In Anger

When looking back at Cascade, Nigel and Guy have similar views about the company they worked so hard at. "I have huge pride in what we achieved," says Guy, "because not only did we prove so many doubters wrong but we had the sheer satisfaction of achieving so much in such little time. It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience." It's hard not to agree with Guy when you consider Cascade had begun with an investment of merely £200 of his savings with no bank loans or government grant, to a software house boasting over £1 million turnover. "But most of all," concludes Guy, "it was fun – a new type of business in an industry that had barely begun and despite all the pressures, I couldn't wait for each new day to see what would happen next." Nigel notes that despite its notoriety today, perhaps we should be a bit more merciful on *Cassette 50*.

"When it originally came out, there weren't that many games in the market; people were typing in listings from magazines simply to get any kind of game on their computer. Of course, we realised the games weren't the best but as things progressed we simply didn't have the time to update them, despite the compilation still selling well. In a way, *Cassette 50* was almost too successful for its own good." When it comes to Cascade and the games industry, Nigel is a lot more sanguine and told us the following. "In its heyday, the business was quite fun, simple and a relatively uncrowded market. We thought it would never end, but by the end of the decade it had changed to a real scramble and margins were much tighter thanks to development costs shooting through the roof."



»[Amiga] Beyond some improved graphics and sound, *DNA Warrior* failed to improve upon the C64 version.

Given the unfortunate demise of both Cascade and Artronic, we were tempted to ask Nigel and Guy if there was anything they would have liked to have changed if they had the opportunity to do so. "There are three or four significant changes I would make that seem obvious now," says Guy when we put the question to him, "but that can be dangerous; who knows how it would have turned out then?" Nigel is determined not to have regrets, and yet he still ponders on the fallout of Artronic's end. "I was pretty gutted when it all stopped, and I'd let some people down in terms of employment," he reflects, "but I like to think of Cascade as my million pound MBA because I learned some very valuable lessons about life and business from the whole experience. Honestly spoken, I wouldn't change it for the world."

Our special thanks to Guy Wilhelmy, Nigel Stevens and all our interviewees.

THE CASSETTE 50 EFFECT



The phenomenal success of *Cassette 50* took many people by surprise, not to mention Cascade's poor beleaguered postman. "At our office, we had a post-box alongside two others," remembers Nigel wryly, "and we were getting so many orders for *Cassette 50* that the postman was unable to stuff anything else into it." Cascade's solution was to invest in a bigger box, but it wasn't long before even this was eclipsed by the mountain of cheques for the compilation.

Eventually an extra postman was assigned to the building with both posties lugging the sacks of mail directly into their office and bypassing the inadequate post-box entirely. Cascade's local bank, The Yorkshire Bank, weren't too thrilled either, with nervous staff always keeping a sharp eye out for the arrival of Guy or Nigel with a huge pile of cheques that they were obliged to process the same day, thus ensuring a late night for the unlucky cashier.

19 PART 2: COMBAT ZONE



It seemed logical that after *Boot Camp* would come the chance for players to put their skills to the test in a simulation of the Vietnam war itself. With Cascade struggling by 1989, however, the sequel was destined never to appear. Producer on the game was Sean Conran.

"I'm pretty sure the sequel was proposed, but I don't think it ever got past the idea stage," he says, "and at the time, the concept of part two was part of the hype used to promote the first game to the media." Nigel Stevens agrees. "I don't remember part two even getting to an idea or development stage."

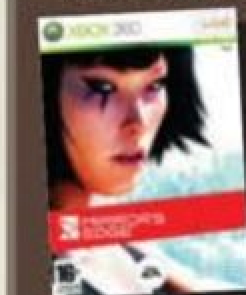

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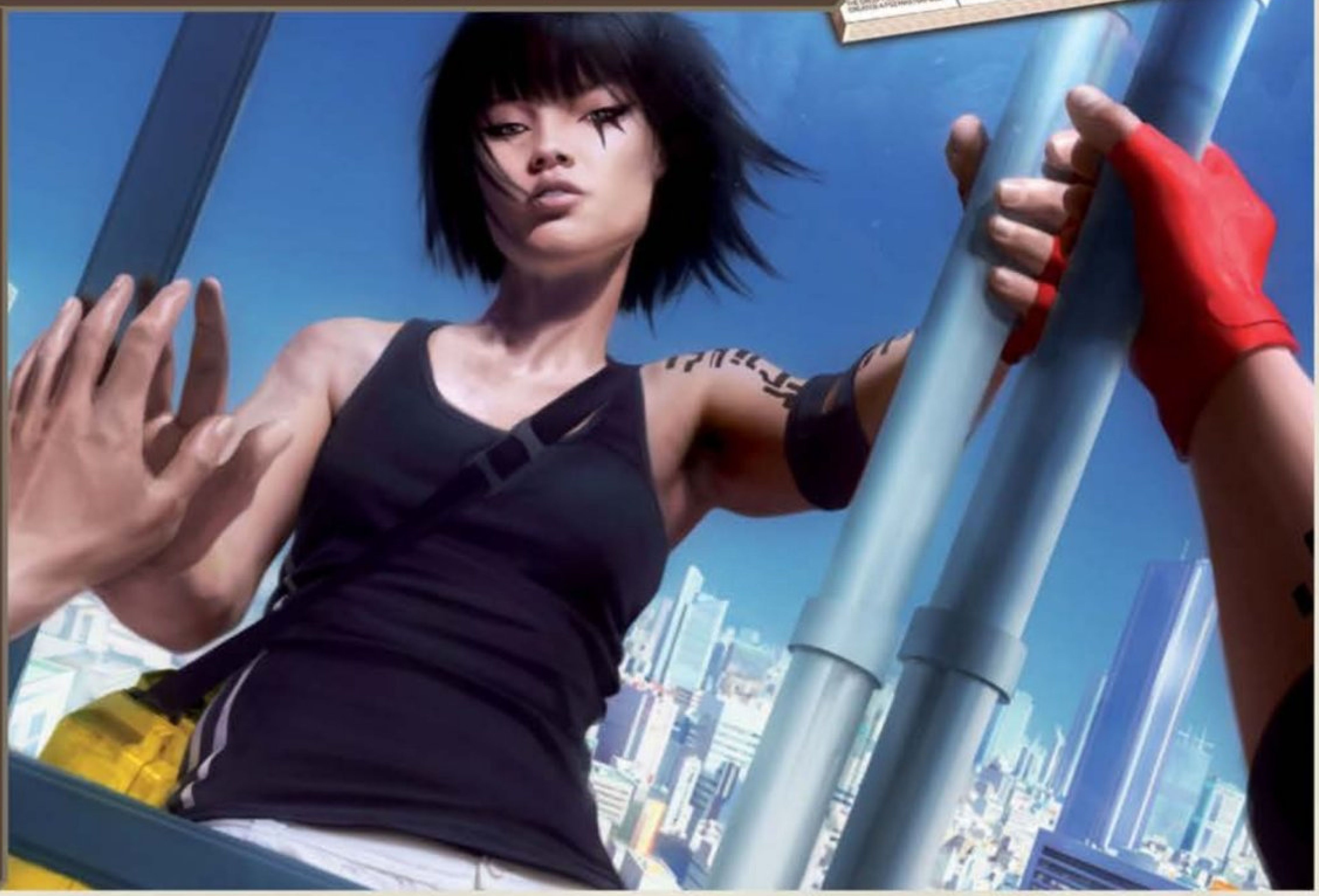

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Future Classic



Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- **» Featured System:** Xbox 360
- **» Year Released:** 2008
- **» Publisher:** EA
- **» Developer:** DICE
- **» Key People:** Owen O'Brien (senior producer), Senta Jakobsen (senior development director), Magnus Walterstad (audio director)

GO DEEPER

- **» Faith was originally going to carry a gun in the game, until DICE thought better of it – early artwork for the game depicts her with a pistol.**
- **» 2011 game *Battlefield 3* has a street sign reading "Ave. de Faith Connors", indicating that *Mirror's Edge* hasn't been forgotten.**

26. MIRROR'S EDGE

An FPS without guns, free running simulator Mirror's Edge turned the most functional part of such games into an extraordinary experience

THE BACKGROUND

As part of a drive to publish quality new IP, *Mirror's Edge* joined *Dead Space* as one of EA's key new-gen titles when it was announced in 2007. DICE, previously known only for multiplayer shooter series *Battlefield*, sought to turn its primary genre upside down. "With *Mirror's Edge* we set out to make something that was completely different from anything we had done before and, to a certain extent, different to anything anyone had done before," producer Owen O'Brien said in 2010.

DICE didn't want to rest on its laurels, and *Mirror's Edge* grew out of that: a mainly gun-free FPS that employed free running as its governing mechanic. The developer wanted to challenge the notion that realistic movement couldn't be done in an FPS genre – the fascinatingly sterile vision of the future grew out of that, as DICE's intention was to create a world that provoked the senses, giving the player a metaphorical look at this dystopia as protagonist Faith saw it.

While not a massive seller, crushed by the influx of releases in the Christmas 2008 period, it quickly earned a cult following for going against the curve of dull military shooters. "We set out to try new things in almost every area and challenge conventions," O'Brien added. "Some of these worked really well and some less so, but I'm glad we tried them all."

THE GAME

There is nothing quite like *Mirror's Edge* – it lies somewhere in the massive gap between a 3D platformer and a first-person shooter, a game that beautifully simulates the art of free running in a jaw-dropping, clinical utopia. Faith's speed, precision and physicality are your only weapons, and while in many first-person games, movement is simply a means to an end, in this it's the point of the experience.

DICE brings that to life with gusto. Levels are gigantic mazes employing a mixture of linear and freeform routes, intricate puzzles that are unravelled

Things of note



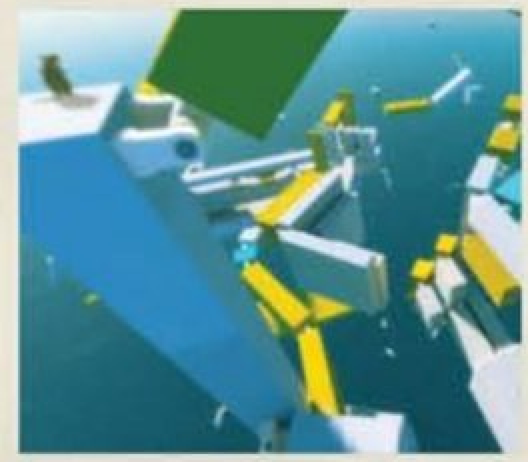
Challenging Faith
Mirror's Edge offers abstract challenge rooms that are almost like *MGS* VR training rooms through a rainbow-coloured filter, encapsulating the purity of the free running.



Mirror's Edge Vs Canabalt
The only continuation of the series on any platform is the basic but reasonably well-made *Mirror's Edge* iOS game, which turns *Canabalt* into something full-featured.



PC Upgrade
DICE is renowned for its technical wizardry with hardware, and naturally, the PC version of *Mirror's Edge* represents the developer's strongest efforts.



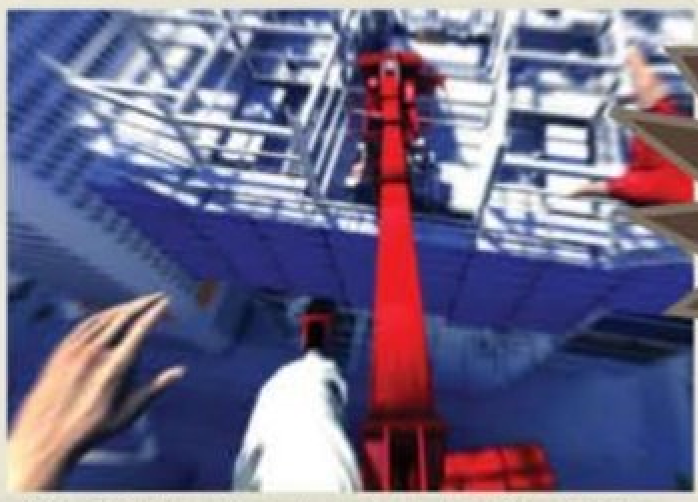
Colour Co-ordination
It's the blend of colour in *Mirror's Edge* that makes the art direction so striking – basic yet bright, it shows what game artists can achieve when given the freedom to experiment.



Sequel, Maybe
Mirror's Edge 2 will happen someday, EA keeps promising – it's just finding the right approach, apparently. We'll believe it when we see it.



» [Xbox360] Guns are so rare that they're almost a treat when you've got hold of one – somehow, though, *Mirror's Edge* is so refined that they feel like a frivolous extra.



» [Xbox360] Though mostly orchestrated, *Mirror's Edge* does offer some freedom in choosing your paths through certain levels.



What the press thought



X360
Score: 8/10
"There's a lot to love in *Mirror's Edge*, times when it reaches potential game of the year material, times when mind, body and control come together."



gamesTM
Score: 8/10
"*Mirror's Edge* needs to be played again and again if you're to discover its true worth, and there are many who won't play ball."



» [Xbox360] Challenge rooms are debatably where the game is at its strongest, possibly because the rubbish storyline is nowhere to be seen.

by experimentation. Faith isn't a superhero, and *Mirror's Edge* ensures that the player is in tune with the character's vulnerabilities; that jumping then turning in mid-air will make her fall on her arse, as it does in real life. It's only as you slowly start to conquer the mechanics that you feel empowered, drawn into this sense of hyperrealism, aided by remarkably subtle sound and visual cues designed to simulate momentum. It's quite extraordinary how these delicate touches, like the sound of breathing or feet pounding against concrete, or even your vision narrowing as you hit full speed, can make movement feel so utterly important.

Nothing illustrates that better than those moments where Faith does have access to a gun, grabbed either by disarming a guard or finding one on the floor – firing a weapon in these instances just feels ordinary. You empty the clip, and move on. A firearm isn't especially helpful when you have to keep moving to survive. It's interesting that a developer so used to building gameplay paradigms around weapons created a game where they were entirely disposable to the player, but *Mirror's Edge* earns the confidence from the player to hinge everything on the free running.

That is assisted by the game's mighty art direction, which portrays a world that is bleakly extravagant, at once colourful yet threadbare. It's a city that tells its own story simply by letting you play. Sadly, when the actual plot does flop into view via dull animated cut-scenes, the script is just generic dystopian tripe completely at odds with the ingenuity behind everything else within the experience.

But that's not the true story of *Mirror's Edge*, anyway – the real narrative is composed of quiet moments on skyscraper rooftops, scarpering away from gunfire or jumping between moving trains. The idea of being Faith represents a unique brand of storytelling that only a game is capable of pulling off.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Mirror's Edge makes you wonder what would happen if every talented triple-A developer on the planet was allowed to explore creativity-driven ideas, rather than marketing-driven ones. Capturing the physicality of free running so perfectly, this was a massive risk by DICE, who were so firmly associated with military shooters prior to *Mirror's Edge*'s release – everything about it felt new. In an industry where the walls seem to be closing in on triple-A games, DICE took its *Battlefield*-honed FPS expertise and convincingly evolved the way we embody virtual characters as players.

Veterans of *Mirror's Edge* understand how rewarding it is to learn the design of the game, inside and out, and to begin seeing the red-highlighted world ahead of Faith as an opportunity for interactive expression, rather than an obstacle. We'd be surprised if any developer re-examined the first-person shooter in this elaborate fashion again.

Bullet heaven
The history of Contra

Retro Gamer sports a bandana, bullet belt and terrible buzz cut to return to the alien-infested jungles of one of Konami's most explosive and much-loved franchises: Contra, which celebrates 25 action-packed years



If you don't count Planet Hollywood (we don't) then silly nostalgia-injected 90-minute guff *The Expendables* is the project that finally brought two of Hollywood's most iconic action heroes together. Spitting more ridiculous dialogue and unloading more bullets into nobodies than an entire generation of online *Call Of Duty* players, Stallone and Schwarzenegger were the Superman and Batman of action cinema, often receiving bigger billing than the titles of the movies they starred in.

If you were a film director working in the Eighties and managed to secure either actor for your movie, even if said movie was a 14-hour art house piece about constructing flat-pack furniture in a white room, you could pretty much guarantee people would flock to see it. And because of Schwarzenegger and Stallone's potent pulling power, it was many an action fan's dream to one day see these two colossuses of action cinema share some screen time together. But for anyone playing videogames in the Eighties that dream was made a virtual reality in 1987 when Konami released *Contra* into arcades.



» [Arcade] Huge monolithic buildings are all part of *Contra*'s heritage. You'll need plenty of firepower to topple them.

Contra-versy

So the totally probable story goes; *Contra* was the result of someone at Konami watching a bunch of action movies – including *Rambo*, *Aliens* and *Commando* – and thinking that combining them in a videogame would be a pretty awesome idea. The end result was a run-and-gun game that pitted two of the biggest action stars of the day against the deadliest threat in cinema at the time (Schwarzenegger and Stallone versus Ridley Scott's *Aliens*). The irony is that Hollywood agreed with Konami's threat ante-upping thinking, as *Predator*, which saw Arnold stuck in a South American jungle with a deadly alien hunter, was released into theatres the same year as *Contra*.

Contra's arcade story told the tale of Bill 'Mad Dog' Rizer and Lance 'Scorpion' Bean, two commandos who get sent to the fictional island of Galuga, just off the coast of New Zealand, to battle an alien organisation called Red Falcon. In

Contra in other games

Blades Of Steel



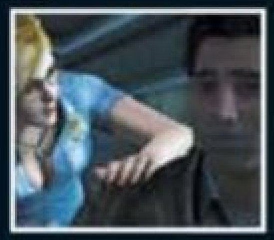
During the half-way point of games, adverts for *Jackal*, *Gradius* and *Contra* flash up in intermissions. Sure, it's shameless in-game advertising, the kind of which is rife in iOS gaming, but back then it felt new and cool.

Wai Wai World 2 – SOS!! Paseri Jou



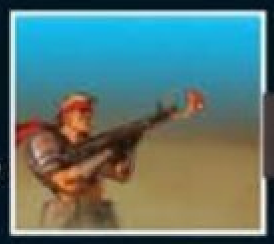
This bonkers platformer stars characters from other Konami games. Bill Rizer (though he looks like Lance in-game) joins *Castlevania*'s Simon Belmont, Goemon, Pentarou the penguin and *Gradius*' Vic Viper.

Silent Hill: Shattered Memories



Silent Hill goes *Shenmue* when protagonist Harry Mason stumbles on some classic arcade machines in a creepy theatre. There's a *Contra*, *Rush'n Attack* and *Gradius* machine. Sadly they're not playable and have seen better days.

Rocket Knight Adventures



The gold Sparkster ending in the disappointing *Rocket Knight* reboot shows Bill Rizer unloading spray gun bullets at the knightly opossum. It's neat because Sparkster was designed by *Contra III* director Nobuya Nakazato.

It was many an action fan's dream to see these two share some screen time together





» [Arcade] *Super Contra*'s viewpoint would change between stages.



» [Arcade] Arnold Schwarzenegger has a lot to answer for…



» [Arcade] *Contra*'s base sections remain exhilarating to play.

the Eighties the word "contra" carried with it strong political connotations from the Iran-Contra affair; a political scandal involving the US selling arms to Iran to fund the Contras: Nicaraguan rebel armies that were revolting against the Sandinista government. Konami has never confirmed that the scandal influenced the naming of its game (though why would it?). However, it's clear the developer was a spectator of US international relations at the time, as the title of its earlier side-scrolling cold war themed shooter *Rush'n Attack* proves. The word contra *was* politically charged at the time, though, and this is widely accepted as the reason for the arcade name getting changed to *Gryzor* – a completely made up word with no connection to anything – when released in Europe.

So why was *Contra* so important? Well, it basically did for shooters what *Double Dragon* did for fighting games the same year: it redefined its genre. Most early on-foot shooters played out from a top-down perspective, Capcom's *Commando* and SNK's *Ikari Warriors* being famous examples, but *Contra*'s action played out side-on. It was a decision that made perfect sense. After all, if you're going to put cheeky replicas of two of the biggest actions stars of the day in your game then it seems dumb to then force players to stare at the tops of their heads for its entire duration. Moreover, the perspective also allowed Konami to impart more interesting and varied levels into the game, and also brought a practical use in helping simplify the gunplay – as bullets were limited to moving on a single horizontal plane it was easier to mow down enemies and evade their bullets.

It was a combination of *Contra*'s challenging fast-paced combat and variety that made it so playable. From its eight-way direction controls and assortment of pick-up weapons, to its memorable bosses, atmospheric stages and cooperative gameplay, it was the most ambitious run-and-gun the arcades had ever seen, and following its success many developers began mimicking the template Konami had created – *Midnight Resistance, ESWAT, Metal Slug*.

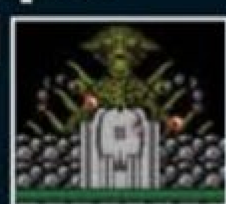
"The most ambitious run-and-gun the arcades had ever seen"

Monster Squad

Few game series have produced as many grotesque-looking bosses as *Contra*. Here are our favourites in the series…

Alien gatekeeper

■ FROM: CONTRA



The alien doorway between you and finishing the 'waterfall' stage of *Contra* is the first real reveal of the Giger-style alien threat in the game, even if the NES version looks like a novelty tie-rack. Ace, though terrifying in 1987.

Vicious Slave Hawk

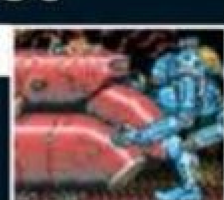
■ FROM: CONTRA III



One of the most disturbing bosses in *Contra*. A lovely mixture of scorpion, elephant, human and condom legs, this mess of a creature has a nasty charging attack and burrows. It debuted as a boss in the NES port of *Super C*.

Running Robot

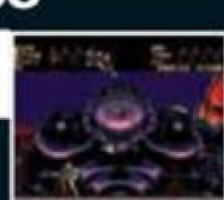
■ FROM: CONTRA ADVANCE



This tweaked handheld *Contra III* port replaces the top-down Mode 7 stages with side-scrolling levels. The best new stage is the second, a gunfight that takes place on a speeding train and ends with fighting a robot.

Robot Cyclops

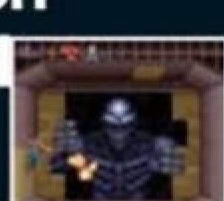
■ FROM: CONTRA: HARD CORPS



The sub-boss of the first stage is pretty memorable. You see this giant robo-Cyclops in the distance decimating the city before it takes to the sky and lands directly in front of you. He attacks with his laser eye blast and by tossing cars. Easy enough to fight: just aim for his eye.

Giant Skeleton

■ FROM: CONTRA III



You get locked in a room with two *Terminator*-style robots who attack with arm-mounted cannons. Destroy them and you upset the daddy, who rips through the wall and unloads a combination of gunfire and Tabasco breath.

Turtle Boss, take 2

■ FROM: CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER



Shattered Soldier pays homage to *Contra III*'s 'turtle' boss in its first stage. It initially seems to be a facsimile of the original until you blow its head away and shows this bloated, puffy, pained face where its butt should be. Oh, and it vomits.

Back home

While folks with 8-bit home computers in Europe were blasting away alien scum in decent *Gryzor* ports in their homes, those wealthy enough to own a NES were playing a bizarre version of *Contra* with the strange title *Probotector* (a portmanteau of robot and protector) which replaced Bill and Lance with two robots with the dull names RD-008 and RC-011. This character swap is said to have come about to appease Germany's strict policy at the time about videogames depicting violence and war. As a result, Nintendo's console ended up with three different versions of *Contra*: the US port, a Japanese version which featured extra cut-scenes and better animation, and the PG-13 European *Probotector* version, which was based on the US port.

Wanting to capitalise on Contra's popularity in the US, Konami got to work on an arcade sequel. *Super Contra* holds the dual honour of being both the first and last arcade sequel in the series. Released in 1988, it made more obvious winks to Stallone, Schwarzenegger and the movie *Alien* through an amusing introduction that featured bad impressions of the actors and a final stage that included bipedal Alien Xenomorphs, hatching Alien eggs and even Facehugger-style enemies. Though *Super Contra* had better visuals and more varied enemies, its level design is less interesting than the original, due to the inclined surfaces it introduces being overused. This causes the side-scrolling sections feel a lot more linear and more like straight left-to-right processions as opposed to those in the original which featured multiple platforms and top, middle, bottom-style structure. *Super Contra* is notable for being the first game in the series to have overhead sections, and introduce main recurring boss Jagger Froid – the snake-armed final boss who also pops up in *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, *Contra 4* and *Contra ReBirth*. *Super Contra* received conversions for NES, PC and Amiga and a loose Game Boy port called *Operation C*. *Operation C* marked *Contra*'s debut on a handheld, and was the first game in the series to have an automatic machine gun as the default weapon.

The next game is an interesting one as it actually started development as an unrelated military-themed shooter called *Arc Hound* before it eventually became affiliated with *Contra*. When *Arc Hound* was canned for release in Japan, Konami decided to salvage the work and release it for the NES in North America as *Contra Force*, turning it into a spinoff. The end result was a decent shooter, but one that didn't feel very *Contra*-y chiefly because there was no Bill, no Lance and no *Aliens*. *Contra Force* does feature plenty of guns though, a neat *Gradius*-style weapon/power-up select system, and four exchangeable characters each with different weapons and physical attributes.

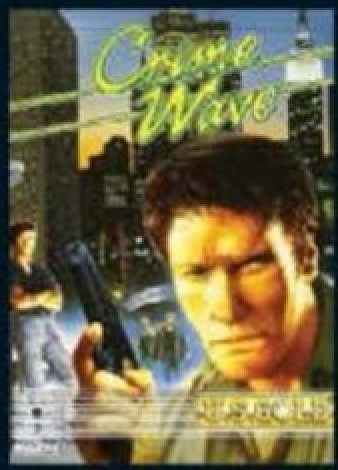
For many fans the next release is the best in the franchise. *Contra III: The Alien Wars* took everything great about the original *Contra* and applied

Bitmap Brothers

Being such bankable action stars, it's no surprise Arnie and Stallone became muses for so many game developers



Bloody Wolf
The Japanese flyer for *Bloody Wolf*, released in Europe as *Battle Rangers*, features two Bill and Lance (sorry, Arnie and Stallone) lookalikes.



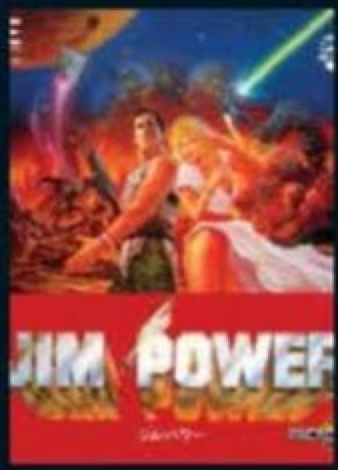
Crime Wave
The box of this *NARC* clone by Access Software features a pistol-toting guy who looks like Arnold circa *Kindergarten Cop* and *True Lies*.



Streets Of Rage 2
The Japanese artwork for *Streets Of Rage 2* saw Axel played by Jean-Claude Van Damme and Mr. X by Arnie.



Mechanised Attack
SNK's *Mechanised Attack*, a gun game starring the Terminator… and Christopher Lambert, so it would seem.



Jim Power In Mutant Planet
The Japanese box for this run-and-gunner portrayed Jim as Arnold's character from *Raw Deal*, a 1986 action film.



Devastators
Devastators is an into-the-screen shooter starring two Rambo lookalikes. It plays similarly to Taito's 1989 *Rambo III* arcade game.



Ikari Warriors
Not one but two Rambos, albeit going under the aliases Ralf and Clark, the most notable difference being their bandanas.

to them almost Tolkien levels of creativity and imagination. Unless it's the Japanese or European *Super Probotector: Alien Rebels* version you're playing, this episode saw Bill and Lance replaced by descendents Jimbo and Sully. The brilliance of *Contra III* comes from variety. From the opening level that sees you clinging on for dear life to steel building bones as the flaming city flares beneath you, to the exhilarating motorbike freeway chase, it's set-piece after set-piece. And if you love *Contra III* then you should check out *Contra Advance* – an odd handheld port that replaces the top-down section with lovely new side-scrolling stages, including a fabulously fun *Gunstar Heroes*-style train battle.

Despite the mammoth acclaim heaped on *Contra III*, and the series' association with Nintendo, the Super NES only received one *Contra* game. After its release, Konami chose to briefly move the series to the Mega Drive with 1994's excellent *Contra: Hard Corps*. This sequel is a game for the *Contra savant*, something that makes Konami's decision to release it on the Mega Drive all the more peculiar. We can speculate with some degree of confidence though that the popularity of Treasure's superb *Gunstar Heroes* probably had something to do with the decision.



» [DS] Wayforward's take on *Contra* was superb stuff.

Compared to previous games then *Hard Corps* feels like a jam of *Contra III* and *Contra Force*. It features four characters – a male and female soldier, robot and anthropomorphic fox – and a similar *Gradius*-style weapon system as *Contra Force*, but the aesthetics and imagination of *Contra III*, which is no great surprise as both games share director Nobuya Nakazato. *Hard Corps* is a brilliant but brutal blaster, one fully loaded with memorable set-pieces and bosses and really puts the Mega Drive through its paces. It is also the first *Contra* to be entirely side-scrolling. There are no top-down or over-the-shoulder sections, just pure unadulterated left-to-right blasting. It does however have branching stages, multiple endings (and a few secret ones – including one where your character travels back to prehistoric times to live out the rest of their days) and tons of weapons, all of which give it immense re-playability, that's if you can finish it, of course.



» [SNES] The *Contra* series draws inspiration from the *Alien* franchise.

From the opening level to the motorbike freeway chase, it's set-piece after set-piece

As gaming entered the 32-bit era *Contra* didn't really carry the same power it did. The run-and-gun market had become saturated on 16-bit machines and the mainstream began caring less about 2D games once the polygonal likes of *Tekken* and *Tomb Raider* began appearing on game shelves, regardless of how good the games were – *Rapid Reload* anyone? So this might explain why Konami felt comfortable handing the reins of *Contra* to a third-party developer, with the next two games developed by Appaloosa Interactive (formerly Novatrade who made *Ecco The Dolphin* and *Kolibri*).



» [DS] Annoyingly, *Contra 4* was never released in the UK.

Appaloosa's first game was *Contra: Legacy Of War*. Released for PlayStation and Sega Saturn, it marked the series' first foray into 3D – and in more ways than one. Its action played out through an isometric viewpoint and was compatible with 3D glasses that came packaged with the game. Suffering from a shaky camera, garish visuals, twitchy animation and six short levels, it's a mediocre shooter, though it was the first European game to keep the *Contra* name and human soldiers. Perhaps in rejoinder to the poor reaction *Legacy Of War* received, Appaloosa's second game, the terribly titled *C – The Contra Adventure*, wisely reverted back to the traditional gameplay of old (for the most part), combining a mixture of different gameplay styles, from side-scrolling levels to third-

person sections that play like *Tomb Raider*. Only seeing release in the US, *The Contra Adventure* marks a disappointing PlayStation legacy for the franchise.

Back in the saddle

With the PS era behind them, Konami took back control of *Contra* and got it back on track for the next instalment. *Contra: Shattered Soldier*, which appeared on PS2, is probably the bleakest and most challenging entry in the series. And *with Contra III* and *Hard Corps* director Nobuya Nakazato once again in the driving seat, the magic returns. Making great use of the graphical muscle of the PS2, *Shattered Soldier* is one of the most stunning looking *Contra*s in the series. And like the equally brilliant *R-Type Final*, captures the essence of a classic through an arresting 2.5D filter. The big *Contra* tradition that *Shattered Soldier* discards is weapon pick-ups. Instead, the game provides a loadout of different weapons that can be changed on the fly. It's also famous for being the *Contra* that broke up the awesome friendship when it merged Lance with alien DNA and made him a shock antagonist.

The PS2 follow-up saw Nakazato as producer and the series return to the *Legacy Of War* style of gameplay: top-down for the most part but also adding the occasional side-scrolling and over-the-shoulder section. Exhibiting the same grimy visuals of *Legacy Of War, Neo Contra* can be seen as Konami having a bit of fun with the series. This is evident in its over-the-top cut-scenes and dialogue, and whimsical bosses – Plant Contra and Animal Contra? With Lance dead after the events of *Shattered Soldier*, Bill is now out to avenge his friend and teams up with new guy Genbei Yagyu, a samurai. *Neo* is one of the easiest games in the series.

In 2007, *Contra* fans were treated to a memorable 20th anniversary courtesy of Nakazato and WayForward Technologies. *Contra 4*, which was released for DS, cribbed generously from Contra III, so it's no surprise it's one of the best games in the series. It's certainly the best handheld game. Playing like a missing Super NES sequel, *Contra 4* ticks every box. It looks great, and its levels are exhilarating set-piece medleys paying homage to some of the iconic stages in previous games. It also makes great use of the handheld's dual screens through a new *Bionic Commando*-style grappling hook. It also brings Lance and Bill's NES port nicknames to life through two unlockable characters called Scorpion and Mad Dog. The icing on this tasty cake is a heavy amount of bonus content, including comic books and concept art to the NES ports of *Contra* and *Super Contra* (*Super C*). The only snag: it was shamefully never released in Europe.



» [Wii] *Contra: Rebirth* proved Konami hadn't forgotten its once popular series.

Back to basics

Possibly understanding it was onto a good thing by retaining the classic feel of its franchise, Konami treated three of its classics – *Gradius, Castlevania* and *Contra* – to WiiWare reboots all wearing the label *ReBirth*. *Contra ReBirth* is another SNES-style outing with that classic frenetic action, breathless action set-pieces and challenging gameplay. The only criticism you could fire at it is that it doesn't really innovate. Sticking with digital, the next and currently last game in the series is *Hard Corps: Uprising*. A digital release for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, *Uprising* was developed by Arc System Works, the studio most famous for the striking *BlazBlue* and *Guilty Gear* series. *Uprising* is basically a pretty anime-soaked revival of the *Hard Corps* series, and melds together the 2.5D gameplay of *Shattered Soldier* with the jaunty colourful look of classic *Contra*. It adds a smattering of new moves, including a ground and mid-air dash, and the rather excellent Rising mode which allows you to earn points as you play which can be used to upgrade your weapons and character.

Though *Contra* seems to have come full circle in recent years that's only because it got plenty right at the start. The high points in the series all exhibit the same core elements. Its fans know exactly what they want, and so any repetition and lack of innovation is forgiven if the challenge, imagination and entertainment factor is high. *Contra* is basically videogaming's testament to 'if it ain't broke'.



» [PS2] *Shattered Soldier* is insanely tough, but it remains a solid franchise addition.



» [PS3] *Hard Corps: Uprising* proved that there's still plenty of interest in the *Contra* franchise.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





» As with many popular scrolling fighters of the time, *Hook* allowed a second player to join in the action. Needless to say it made the game a lot more fun to play.

» The visuals are well detailed, and similar in style to Irem's *Undercover Cops*, giving it a less cartoony look than other *Hook* videogames.

» You have the choice of five different characters (Peter Pan and four Lost Boys). They have different styles of attacks and signature special moves.

» The stages feature plenty of interactive objects, most of which can be used as weapons against Hook's men.

HOOK

■ **Developer:** Irem ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **The only arcade game in history that lets you beat up Bob Hoskins and Dustin Hoffman as Robin Williams, *Hook* is based on the 1991 film of the same name starring Williams as the 'boy that never ages' (though he did in the movie) and directed by Stephen Spielberg.**

While a scrolling-fighter might seem like an odd direction for a videogame based on *Peter Pan*, the results are enjoyable enough to recommend investigating if you're a big fan of the genre. *Hook* never punches *Final Fight*-weight levels, but is still a fun brawler thanks to its entertaining swashbuckling action and varied feeling levels.

Following the plot of the movie loosely, you play middle-aged Peter Pan (Williams). Now residing in London, a family man and working as a lawyer, Pete is forced to return to Neverland to rescue his kids from his arch nemesis Captain Hook. This rescue mission takes place over six stages which take him and four Lost Boys through a variety of pirate-infested locales, including a watering hole, jungle, docks and, of course, a pirate ship.

Perhaps realising that Neverland is one of the big draws of the source material, the levels and environments are one of the best aspects of *Hook*. All are filled with interactive booby traps and weapons to use against the pirates and they do well to complement its swashbuckling combat. You can launch alligator eggs at your enemies, which hatch on impact, or aggravate a wasp nest around them, drop some crystal chandeliers on their heads – the list is long and varied. And there's also a nice selection of melee weapons too, from cartoon bombs and spears to softballs and erm… hatchets. Each character is given their own set of moves but there isn't much separating them in terms of strength, agility, or how they pummel enemies. They do have unique special attacks though, and some are more effective than others.

There's plenty packed into *Hook*, and the pacing is pretty good too. *Hook* also takes amusing artistic licence with many of the characters, particularly the bosses – most of which would probably look better placed in a *Fist Of The North Star* brawler than one based on the whimsical fantasy world of J.M. Barrie. But the grubby-looking art style still works well, bridging the gap between the brutal genre and the source material nicely.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

GOLDEN AXE 1989

With its multiple characters and varied fantasy locales, Sega's legendary hack-and-slash game fits the bill. We were going to recommend Irem's own *Blade Master*, which is very similar to *Golden Axe*, but it too was unconverted. We love *Golden Axe*, it's still one of our favourites.

FUNKY JET

■ **Developer:** Mitchell ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up



» [Arcade] *Funky Jet* is a fun in short bursts – it's perfect tea-break filler basically.

■ ***Funky Jet* is tone of those fun-in-short-bursts games, perfect arcade fodder basically, and its short-burst appeal is likely the reason why it never escaped arcades.** Looking like the bastard child of *Bubble Bobble* and *Sonic Blast Man*, it stars two jetpack-wearing kids who must biff and fly their way through seven themed stages clearing each of enemies to progress to the next. Keeping things nice and simple, you have two methods of basic attack: jabs and a spinning clothesline move that is useful for when enemies attack from both sides. There is also a selection of power-ups too, ranging from speed boots to an invincibility type power that causes the kids to go a bit mental and flap their arms faster than Michael Phelps being chased by gold-loving jellyfish. While the enemies are a varied bunch, the problem with the game is that most will simply stand there waiting for you to sock them in the face, and pose little threat, and that you can earn bonuses by sending enemies flying into one another makes the game even easier. *Funky Jet* is a simple and initially fun title, but quickly gets repetitive on account of its repetitive gameplay and easiness.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

TUMBLE POP 1991



Replace *Funky Jet*'s jet packs for high-powered vacuum cleaners and you pretty much arrive at *Tumble Pop*. The aim of the game remains essentially the same: clear the screens of enemies and earn extra points by knocking them into each other.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

1942 1984



The classic air combat game by Capcom is a good alternative. Set in the Pacific War, *1942* is a simple shooter that has some neat tricks: for example, your plane could perform a loop the loop and roll.

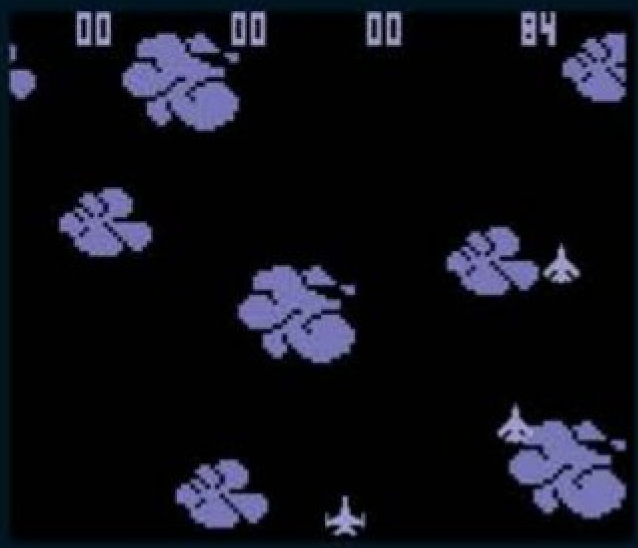
PHANTOM II

■ **Developer:** Bally Midway ■ **Year:** 1979 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

■ **Though its visuals will probably have you think that what you see is what you get with *Phantom II* (read: not a great deal), this early air combat game from Bally Midway is actually a surprisingly decent shooter, especially considering its age.**

Its action is divided into two distinct parts. The first finds you shooting down fidgety enemy planes as you try not to lose sight of them in the fluffy clouds that fill the sky; the second sees the action disrupted by a thick curtain of white cloud that completely obscures your view of them.

When this happens, the game switches to radar mode, which basically causes a square of the screen to continually travel up the screen and provide visibility through the clouds to gain an idea of enemy positions. Upping both the challenge and the tension, it adds an extra dimension to the action and elevates *Phantom II* from basic territory. Sure it doesn't look like much, but considering its age we're surprised *Phantom II* wasn't a bigger deal on its release.



» [Arcade] Don't let the dour visuals put you off checking out *Phantom II*, it's a decent little shooter.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

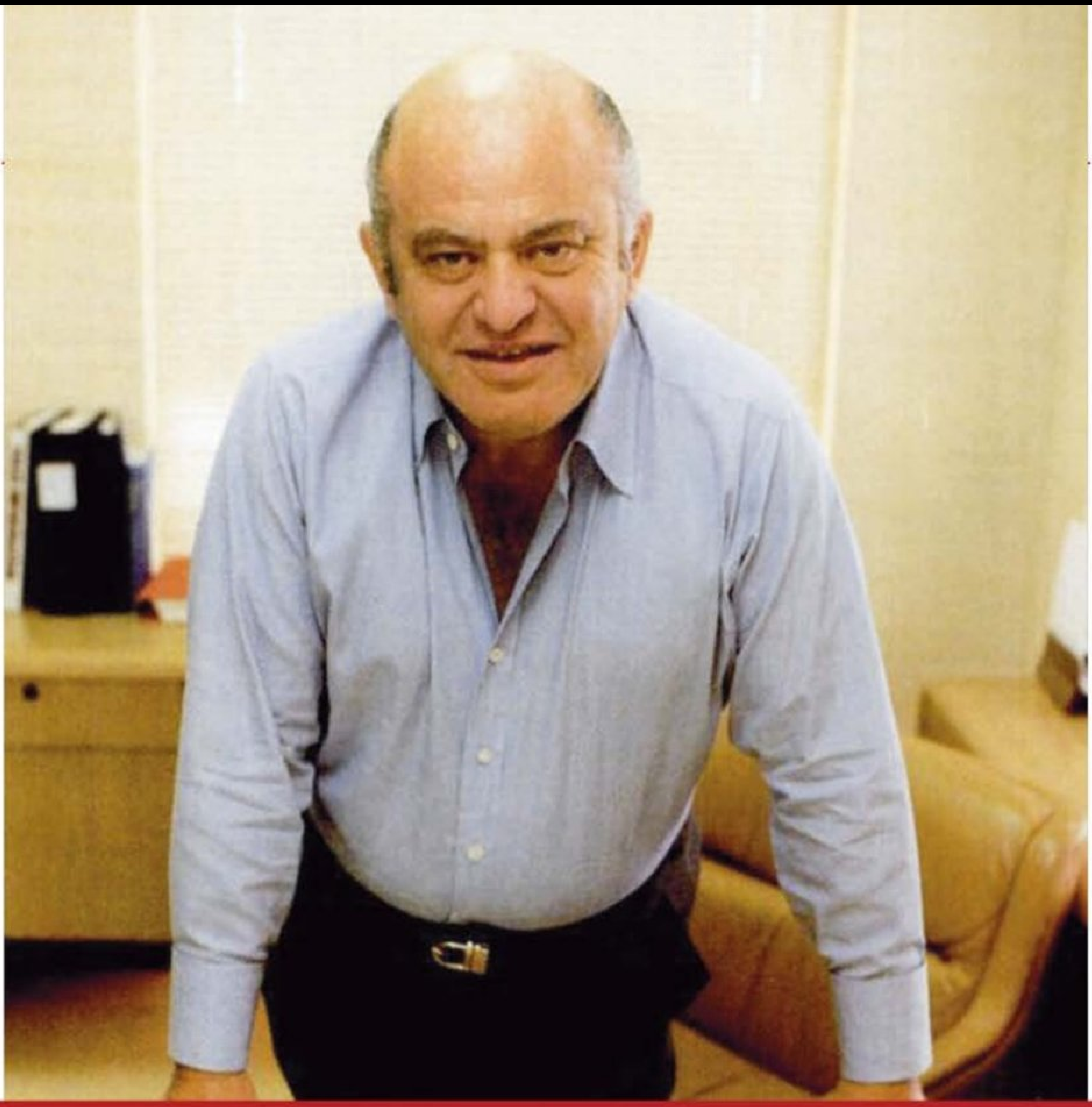
D-CON

■ **Developer:** Success ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

■ ***D-CON* plays like a cross between *Space Invaders* and *Missile Command*.** Sadly this marriage is about as exciting as shopping for grey socks. Tasked with protecting a series of locations from aliens, its gameplay amounts to nothing more than a frustrating juggling act as you scan the landscape (which is wider than your ship's viewfinder but fully displayed via radar), moving the targeting reticule, shooting down enemies and preventing their projectiles hitting the bottom of the screen. With recycled enemies, boring bosses and no power-ups or extra weapons, save for limited use of an incendiary gun that creates an explosion in the sky that obliterates anything it touches, *D-CON* feels rushed in execution.

We'd suggest just sticking with *Missile Command*, as it packs more tension and enjoyment in its title screen than *D-CON* does in its entire duration. Despite being forgettable and totally uninspired, *D-CON* was developed by Success Ltd, the Japanese developer behind the *Cotton* series. The studio is still releasing games today, and one of their more recent game offerings was *Zoo Keeper* on DS.





GAMING LEGENDS

JACK TRAMIEL

Marty Goldberg takes a look at the legend of Jack Tramiel. Although primarily known for his work on gaming platforms than any actual games, Jack's computers and consoles were responsible for generations of happy gamers

Now before you start asking "What is Jack Tramiel doing here?" please understand that we know full well this isn't your average game designer profile. Obviously, Jack Tramiel's contributions to gaming are in hardware, providing some of the most popular platforms in history. Though his platforms such as the PET, Vic-20, and Commodore 64 became extremely popular, Jack himself was never in it for the popularity. Jack, instead, seemed to thrive on the thrill of competition. Demonstrating his ferocious will and competitive spirit, his slogan "Business is War" lead the battle cry for Commodore's home computer market dominance during the Eighties.

Jack was no stranger to war himself, starting his business career as an immigrant and Holocaust survivor. Jack was able to create his first company Commodore out of nothing, and survived the competitive markets of both typewriters and electronic calculators before steering Commodore into computers in the Seventies.

He also thrived on producing products he knew the masses would love because of their high power for a low price, or as he put it "Computers of the masses and not the classes." Coming from nothing himself, he knew full well the trials and tribulations of the average person and how putting affordable yet powerful technology in their hands could empower them. Like Orson Wells stating "We will sell no wine before its time," Jack would make sure not a single product was released that didn't meet his goal of pleasing the masses. Embedding that goal in every stage from engineering to marketing, if development ever took too long that development costs and ultimately the cost to the consumers rose, Jack had no problem making sure the project died in transit.

Jack and Commodore's first foray into games came around the time Commodore was entering the computer market with the PET. Called *The TV Game*, the series of consoles are *Pong* clones based around micro-controller chips designed by Jack's recent acquisition: MOS Technology. The real impetus for Jack's ties to gaming really came from Commodore's next big computer, the Vic-20. Pushing the Vic-20 through after butting heads with his engineers and management (who were against its development), the Vic-20 went on to become the first computer to sell over one million units after its 1980 release (in Japan as the Vic-1001).

For a little more than $100 over the price of an Atari 2600, you could now get a full-fledged computer



» From left to right, Sam, Gary, Jack and Leonard. The 'family-orientated' management team in the early Atari Corporation days.

with five times the memory of the 2600, a full stroke keyboard, and a plethora of computer peripherals. And while the ads featured *Star Trek*'s William Shatner pitched "Why buy just a videogame?" the truth is that the Vic-20 was a gaming computer. Jack and his assistant Michael Tomczyk saw to that while it was still in development by licensing Scott Adams' *Adventure* series of games for use in cartridge format, and engaging the now legendary HAL Laboratory to make many of the Vic-20's first year titles including clones of popular arcade games. This was followed up with licenses of *Gorf*, *Sea Wolf*, and *Omega Race* in 1982, not to mention the long list of third-party game cartridges released.

Ultimately though, the Vic-20 was a stop gap to keep the Japanese companies looking in the other direction while Commodore finished its real showpiece of 8-bit technology, the Commodore 64. Released in the summer of 1982, it was the only real computer to rival the Speccy in the hearts and minds of Brits. The Commodore 64 went on to become a worldwide phenomenon in computing and gaming, selling around 13 million units in its lifetime. Retailing at almost double the cost of the Vic-20, game-players were now able to have a full computer with 64k of memory, graphics far above any game console on the market and the awesome sound capability of Commodore's custom SID sound chip – still prized for its sound synthesis to this day.

The games on the Commodore 64 looked and sounded simply astounding, with a lot of the now legendary game studios and programmers cutting their teeth on this venerated computer. And Jack's all-out price war with rival computer manufacturers made sure that the Commodore 64's computer gaming experience was one of the most widely experienced of the Eighties, including in the US where, after the home console market crashed from '82-'84, the Commodore 64 was at the forefront of the consumer's switch to home computers.

Alas, just as the 64 was at the top of its game, Jack was forced out of his. A disagreement with chairman Irving Gould forced Jack to resign from Commodore in January 1984, and initially from the entire industry. Taking several months to travel the world in what was supposed to be blissful relaxed retirement, the trickling of news about Japan's growing computer interests and possible entry in to the US market just wouldn't let him rest. Coming back to the US in late March he decided nobody was up to the challenge the Japanese posed, including his beloved Commodore. Deciding to throw his hat in the ring again, he formed Tramel Technology Ltd. (or TTL, with Tramel spelled that way on purpose so people pronounced his last name right), for the express purpose of building a next generation 16-bit computer.

Some of his trusted Commodore engineers began working with him in secret on this new computer,





FAMOUS QUOTES

"People should not buy the ST during the first six months because that is the time for software developers to do their work"

"I'm not a professional executive, I use a personal touch like a family business. I never believed I would be able to run a company the size of Commodore"

"Computers are much more useful than cigarettes"

"All our products are introduced in Japan first. The Japanese are the best critics a foreigner can have to see if you've made a mistake"

"When I get depressed, I watch the Patton movie. I believe in that. I don't think you can sit on your butt. You have to know who your competitor is – who your enemy is. You have to have better tanks. You have to have better equipment to be able to win. And you can't just wait for the Pentagon to tell you what to do. You have to do it"





» Atari used a number of clever ads in order to appeal to adopters of their many home systems..



» This version of the Vic-20's packaging showed who the target audience was: gamers who wanted a personal computer that could also provide an 'arcade experience' at home.

which was followed by some key Commodore management leaving to join him. Bringing his sons Sam and Gary in shortly after, Jack went out to Silicon Valley that Spring looking for technology he could leverage for his new computer. Visiting companies like Amiga and Mindset, the hunt went bust and he was resolved to have his engineers develop their low cost 16-bit computer (codenamed RBP for Rock Bottom Price) completely on their own. Hunkered down with several key engineers (including Shiraz Shivji) in a Silicon Valley hotel room, Jack was surprised when Steve Ross of Warner Communications cold called him that May. Ross was looking to sell off Jack's former rival, Atari Inc., and if he couldn't do that he was interested in chopping it off. Jack was at the top of his list.

By early July they had negotiated for Jack to purchase Atari's Consumer Division, which included the console and computer intellectual property as well as all the facilities, manufacturing and distribution network. Folding it in to TTL, his new company was then renamed Atari Corporation. Suddenly, Jack had the resources and network of a large company at his disposal. There was only one catch: while he famously got everything for "no money down," he also had to take on all of Atari's debt. The millions upon millions that Atari Inc. owed, along with warehouses full of back stock that had proved unmovable, became Jack's new responsibility.

Already starting far in debt and expected to collect from the companies that owed money, when the latter didn't occur, Jack had to pour his own money into the company to keep it afloat. It didn't help that the 7800, Atari Inc.'s next-gen 8-bit console it had just test launched, didn't come with the deal. Then to top it off, Commodore sued his engineers for theft of trade secrets, shutting down his computer operations for a full month.

Jack persevered though, using his money and the selling of the large back stock of videogames to keep the company afloat. Negotiating with Warner and GCC for the 7800, he was able to start up a formal videogame division with the console at its helm by August of '85. And the computer problem? That was solved when Jack's son Leonard, who was now on board as well, discovered a cancelled check from Atari Inc.'s investment in Amiga. With Amiga being bought out by Commodore at the time, Jack cleverly negotiated with Warner for the Amiga contract and used it to launch a countersuit that freed up his ability to finish his RBP computer, which became the ST series.

By early 1986, Jack had completely worked off all the inherited debt. Most importantly, he had single-handedly saved one of the most beloved home videogame names, Atari, from completely dying as it would have if Warner wasn't able to sell it or Jack had failed. As a 16-bit gaming system, the ST computer was very popular throughout Europe and enjoyed an intense rivalry with Amiga's offerings. And although Jack retired from daily operations by 1988, handing over both the CEO and president positions to his son Sam, his solid foundation allowed for more low-cost yet innovative gaming fun to be unleashed on consumers, like the Atari Lynx colour portable system and the Atari Jaguar.

Coming out of retirement after his son Sam had a heart attack in 1995, Jack's once profitable company was now on its last leg. Arranging a merger with drive manufacturer JTS, this would be Jack's last association with anything gaming-related. Eventually passing on surrounded by his family in April of this year, Jack's lasting contributions to computing and gaming can be denied by few and enjoyed by all.



» Ads such as this one with Vic-20 spokesman William Shatner, showed the Vic-20 was for videogames and so much more.



» While the Atari Lynx set the bar high for handheld game consoles for years to come, its expensive colour LCD display didn't allow it to be priced competitively against the Game Boy.



TV GAME 1976/77

■ When Jack smartly bought MOS Technology in late 1976, he was making sure he never got screwed over again like he had been by Texas Instruments' decision to enter the calculator market with their own calculators instead of just OEMing the chips for others to build. With MOS he had his own in-house microprocessor and IC designer and fabricator. What he didn't count on though was that MOS had already been looking to go after General Instruments and their OEM AY-3-8500 'PONG-on-a-chip' with their own chips: The MCS-7600 series. Separating itself from GI, these chips are actually full micro-controllers instead of custom one-off chips, complete with their own RAM and stored program. Unknown to many readers, Commodore entered two markets at the same time, game consoles and personal computes with the TV Game (2000K, 3000H) and Commodore PET 2001.

VIC-20 1980

■ Championed internally by Jack and Michael Tomczyk, the Vic-20 was meant to serve the dual purpose of competing on the lower end of the home computer market against the like of Apple, Texas Instruments and Atari, as well as a distraction for the Japanese computer manufacturers. As Michael Tomczyk put it, "Throw the Japanese a low-cost, user-friendly computer, and when they stop to examine it you work like crazy to make an even better computer." For most, it was their introduction to a low-cost gaming computer, and for the Japanese it was the distraction that let the Commodore 64 in the door.



COMMODORE 64 1982

■ What can be said about this legendary computer? Part serious computer, part gaming machine, part synthesizer and all for the low price of $595. With 64K and the untouchable SID sound chip, the Commodore 64 made Commodore a worldwide household name well on it's way to becoming one of the best selling personal computers of all time.



ATARI 7800

1984/1986



■ A victim of Warner's poorly executed selling of Atari Inc.'s Consumer Division to Jack Tramiel, the 7800 sat in limbo while Jack negotiated for its rights between Warner and GCC. Once completed, in August '85 he began looking for someone to spearhead its re-release while starting a new videogame division, which he found in Epyx alumni Mike Katz. Re-released in January 1986, the 7800 was a symbol of the single-handed saving of the Atari consumer brand by Jack.

THE SYSTEMS THAT JACK BUILT

A handy look at the various game platforms Jack introduced on the market…



XE GAME SYSTEM 1987

■ The XE Game System was meant to be the Atari 5200 "done right." Jack's attempt at rewriting the wrong he felt was perpetrated with the 5200, by creating a proper game console and introductory computer combination. Placed as a higher end game console/computer to complement the mid-level 7800 and low-level cost-reduced 2600 (nicknamed the 2600 Jr.), the triple-pronged attack was planned to capture the US game market from Nintendo by smothering it… which of course didn't work out quite as hoped. Mike Katz summed up the problem with both the 7800 and XEGS: "You need hot titles. You can't be a success without hot titles."

ATARI LYNX 1989

■ Technically brought out when Jack was just Chairman of the Board and retired from the CEO position, the Atari Lynx was actually started under Jack's watch. Katz had found out about the hand-held console being done at his old company, and Atari Corp. wound up partnering with Epyx in its development (then called Handy) in exchange for licensing rights. As Epyx hit monetary problems, Atari Corp. recieved the console outright and released it as the Lynx in 1989. Introducing gamers everywhere to full colour portable gaming with advanced graphics far above the Nintendo Game Boy it was soon joined by, alas Katz's mantra was still true: you need hot titles. People wanted *Tetris*, which the Game Boy came bundled with, and Lynx's price was just too high. Still a deal by technology standards, but truthfully Nintendo had out-Jacked Jack.



ATARI JAGUAR 1993

■ Also started when Jack was chairman of the board, this console was Jack's (and Atari's) last hurrah in the videogame market. Probably the most misunderstood console in history thanks to some developers lazily porting over 16-bit Sega Genesis titles, the multi-processor console features advanced 64-bit graphics and DSP driven sound. *Tempest 2000* was the perfect game to show off the console's capabilities during it's launch, but unfortunately the "hot titles" were far and few between from there, leaving the Jaguar to fall even further behind on the market after Sony released its generation-changing PlayStation. When his son Sam suffered a heart attack, Jack was forced to step in as CEO and President, shutting down Jaguar production and eventually merging off Atari Corp.



» The Jaguar unfortunately didn't do as well as it should have done, partly due to poor third-party support.



MODE 7 HEAVEN

Retro Gamer looks back at some of the best and lesser-known examples of Mode 7, the famous graphics mode that became a hallmark for many early Super Nintendo releases and helped elevate Nintendo gaming during the Nineties

Contra III: The Alien Wars

Best Mode 7 moment: The opening stage
Year: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house



The foremost thing to remember about SNES Mode 7 is that its powers are ineffective on game sprites. However, Mode 7 can rotate and increase the size of background images to give the impression they're animated; to create a 'Mode 7 sprite' (a term we've just made up but feel is befitting). Developers are also able to go a step further by adding moving parts made of sprites to really mess with our heads. For two really good examples of this technique in action look no further than the epic first stage of *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, which is packed with Mode 7 moments. The low-flying plane that turns up midway through the game's first stage forms part of a background layer and is animated using Mode 7 (as it comes closer to the screen its size increases and its wings bank slightly). However, the bombs that it drops are sprites. Similarly, the body, neck and head of the turtle boss that awaits at the end of the stage also sits in the background, while the bullets it fires and moving legs are sprites. These are two of the best examples of Mode 7 being used by a developer to create believable animated objects in games.

Chrono Trigger

Best Mode 7 moment: The racing mini-game
Year: 1995
Publisher: Squaresoft
Developer: In-house

There are many examples of Mode 7 being put to good use in Square's epic time-travelling RPG *Chrono Trigger*, but our favourite is the Jetbike mini-game found in the Beyond The Ruins future chapter. While most racing games use Mode 7 to generate into-the-screen tracks, *Chrono Trigger* shows the effect being put to use in a side-on racing scenario – although the shoulder buttons allow you to rotate the camera. The fun and challenging mini-game proved so popular among fans that Square later released a standalone digital version for the Sattellaview titled *Chrono Trigger: Jet Bike Special*.





Demon's Crest

Best Mode 7 moment: Getting around
Year: 1994
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house

Demon's Crest is a superb action/platformer that is every bit as atmospheric and challenging as its famous cousin *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. The third part of the excellent *Gargoyle's Quest* series, *Demon's Crest* made this list purely for its neat world map, which, thanks to some Mode 7 magic, allowed you to navigate and land on it *Pilotwings* fashion to replay stages.

Super Castlevania IV

Best Mode 7 moment: Koronot
Year: 1991
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

The nightmare world of *Castlevania* is the perfect environment for Mode 7 to do its thing, and Konami put it to great use in *Super Castlevania IV*. Mode 7 can be seen in the game's map screen, its rotating stages, those cool rocking chandeliers on Stage 5 and even in some of its more memorable bosses. And this brings us rather nicely to our favourite Mode 7 moment in the game – the stone golem boss Koronot. Fought at the end of stage four, every time you hit him with the Vampire Killer he shrinks in size and causes the sky to hail stones. That is until you make that final killer blow and he expands to fill the entire screen.



Super Mario Kart

Best Mode 7 moment: Rainbow Road
Year: 1992
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

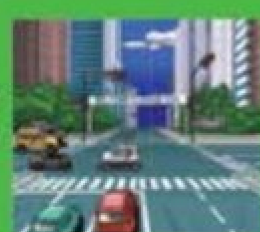
Though *F-Zero* was the first game to show the exhilarating things Mode 7 could bring to racing games, it was clear there was room for refinement. *F-Zero*'s glitzy, neon-coloured racer is certainly fast and pretty, but its racing gets shown up for being shallow when compared to *Super Mario Kart*. *Super Mario Kart* is *F-Zero* but with more intricate tracks, modes and sprites (characters, weapons, power-ups and annoying flat moles). It raised the bar of Mode 7 application, but it also spawned Nintendo's most successful-ever racing franchise. It would also be remiss of us to not mention that Mode 7 marks the first time the bright, vibrant and colourful world of the *Mario* franchise was presented in a way resembling believable 3D. That it was also immensely playable didn't do much to hurt its success either.





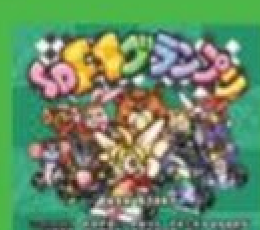
We expose blatant Super Mario Kart copycarts

Kat's Run



This obscure racer plays like a *Gran Turismo* take on *Super Mario Kart*. After picking your driver from the ten spiky-haired racers on offer, you select your vehicle and then compete in street races. Because *Kat's Run* is grounded in reality both visually and track-wise it suffers. With dull circuits and visuals, it is unfortunately one of the least impressive Mode 7 racers on Super Nintendo.

SD F-1 Grand Prix



The most blatant *Super Mario Kart* clone ever produced, *SD F-1 Grand Prix* stars a cast of cuddly super deformed (SD) critters and a few tracks which ape those in Nintendo's racer. As it sticks so close to the *Mario Kart* template it's unsurprising it's a decent racer. The irony though is that it's part of an established racing franchise (Video System's *F1 Grand Prix*) that predates *Super Mario Kart*. One of the more impressive Mode 7 racers.

Uchuu Race: Astro Go! Go!



The colourful eye-bursting result of what happens when you mix two parts *F-Zero* with one part *Super Mario Kart*, *Uchuu Race* is a bright, cutesy cartoonish future racer. The game's most notable thing is that you can turn your craft 360 degrees. As a result, the controls can feel erratic initially and make the more challenging pinball-style obstacle-packed stages quite frustrating. Overall though, it's a decent if imitative racer.





Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time

Best Mode 7 moment: Foot Soldier fling
Year: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

The most vivid Mode 7 scenes are often those that took us by surprise. Those moments we'd be sat playing game X and then all of a sudden a cool Mode 7 trick would materialize from out of nowhere. Though this SNES port features a great Mode 7 recreation of the arcade game's thrilling hoverboard stage, it's the Foot Soldier-towards-camera fling that stuck in our minds most. Capturing the slapstick nature of the cartoon perfectly, seeing it never gets boring. In fact, we'd even go so far as to say it's a frontrunner for the best Mode 7 moment ever.

Exhaust Heat

Best Mode 7 moment: Pitting
Year: 1992
Publisher: Seta Corporation
Developer: In-house

Exhaust Heat is a very different racer to Nintendo's more famous Mode 7 offerings. Its charm and speed are slow coming, with its tracks (based on real circuits) feeling a bit empty by comparison and exhilarating racing only arriving once you've enough money to upgrade your car. But be patient, and you'll find that *Exhaust Heat* is a great racer with some subtle sim elements. Wonderfully presented throughout, our standout Mode 7 moment occurs when you enter a pit and the camera seamlessly rotates to the side of your car.





Run Saber

Best Mode 7 moment: Plane battle
Year: 1993
Publisher: Atlus Co.
Developer: Horisoft

Often dubbed as the *Super Nintendo Strider*, owing to starring two lithe plasma sword-waving heroes able to cling to walls and do fancy somersaults, *Run Saber* is an imitative but entertaining action game. Mode 7 was often used by developers as a way to insert something memorable to boss encounters, and this is demonstrated by *Run Saber*'s first boss. A battle that takes place in the sky, you have to fight a disembodied biomechanical Medusa head while clinging desperately to an F-14 Tomcat that loops in the air.

ActRaiser

Best Mode 7 moment: World map
Year: 1990
Publisher: Enix Corporation
Developer: Quintet

Anyone who has played this unusual city building hack-and-slash marriage will attest that its title screen really utilises Mode 7. Yes, it's just a spinning word, but it grabs your attention. For us though, the best Mode 7 moment has to be when you enter a new stage. Starting from high up in your heavenly hub palace, you see the camera spiral towards the overworld map and home in on the level.



HyperZone

Best Mode 7 moment: First stage
Year: 1991
Publisher: HAL Laboratory
Developer: In-house

HyperZone was an early release for the console and arrived the very same month as the console's US release. Playing like a lovely sounding cross between *F-Zero* and *Space Harrier*, you steer a tubby spaceship through a series of eight colourful Mode 7-created courses, shooting unimaginative enemies until you come up against a slightly less unimaginative looking boss. The stages tracks also have strict lanes to follow, and straying from them causes your ship take damage *F-Zero*-style. While this does help to add a subtle racing feel to the shooting, there's not much fun or variety in *HyperZone*. It's a clear case of Mode 7 over substance – thankfully, and surprisingly, a road the majority of Mode 7 games chose not to follow.





Super Mario World

Best Mode 7 moment: Bowser fight
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

After revisiting *Mario*'s epic 16-bit adventure to write this feature we were surprised to discover that there weren't as many instances of Mode 7 being utilised as we remember. It's mostly used in the boss fights, where it can be seen creating the see-sawing platform you fight Iggy Koopa on and helping Morton Koopa JR. scale the inner walls of his castle. Nintendo saved the best example for last though, with a memorable final battle against Bowser that saw him dropping fireballs, enemies and giant cannonballs from inside a Dr. Robotnik-esque clown-faced flying machine. Breaking from his attack sequences to steer it backwards and then fly it towards the camera until that silly, smug clown face filled the entire screen, if that didn't motivate players into finishing the fight nothing would…Well maybe the added sight of seeing Princess Toadstool appear from inside the device to do her damsel-in-distress bit.

Super Star Wars – The Empire Strikes Back

Best Mode 7 moment: Battle of Hoth
Year: 1993
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Sculptured Software

The Battle of Hoth has been restaged in videogames numerous times, and most have provided great set-piece moments – or in the case of the 2600 an entire game. This epic Mode 7 stage was the most faithful recreation of the epic snow fight. With some stunning undulating Hoth terra firma to fly over, the mission tasks you with destroying a set number of varied targets, ranging from Probe Droids to AT-ATs. The stage then gets really awesome when it introduces AT-AT Walkers to the fight and allows you to take them down by cable-tying their legs together and causing them to trip over and kiss the snow.

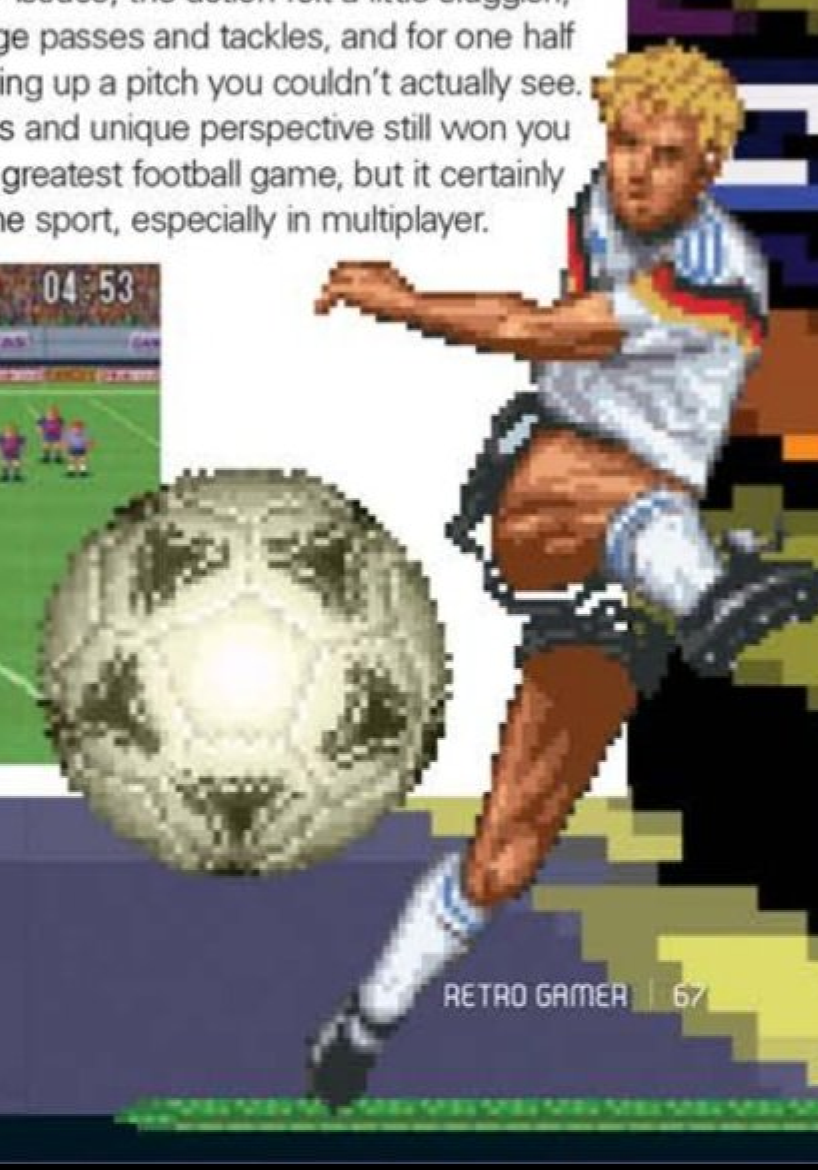


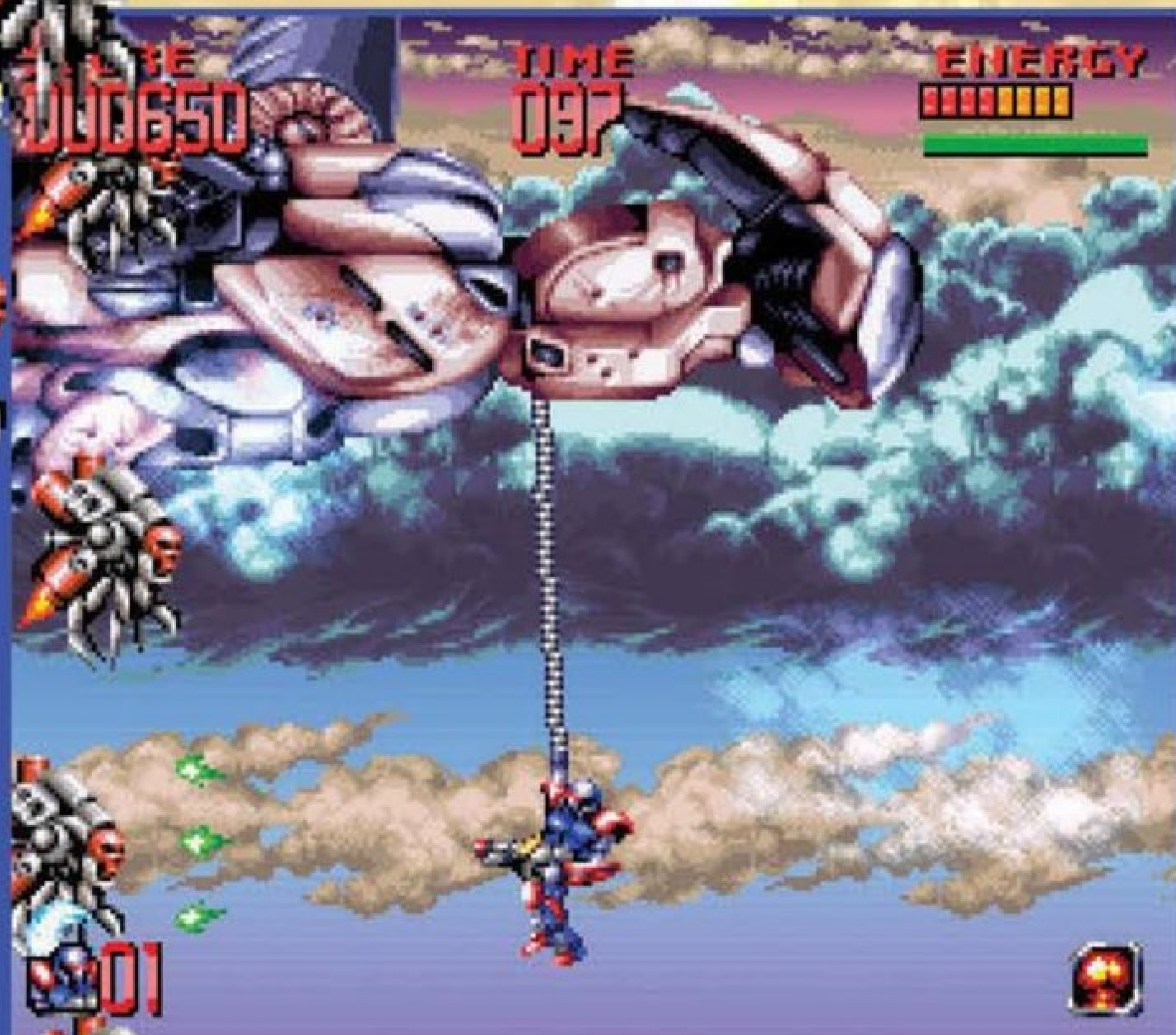
Super Soccer

Best Mode 7 moment: Kick-off
Year: 1992
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Human Entertainment

While *Super Tennis* used Mode 7 in a subtle way – it was used on its intro screen and as a way to circle the camera around the court when players swapped ends, *Super Soccer* was much more blatant in its usage. The impressive looking but fidgety feeling football pitch certainly brought a few issues; the action felt a little sluggish, it wasn't always easy to judge passes and tackles, and for one half of the match you were running up a pitch you couldn't actually see. However, the jaunty graphics and unique perspective still won you over. *Super Soccer* isn't the greatest football game, but it certainly captures the fun nature of the sport, especially in multiplayer.







Super Turrican 2



Best Mode 7 moment: Worm boss
Year: 1995
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Factor 5

Super Turrican 2 really puts the Super Nintendo through its paces. Though it doesn't have the *Metroid* feel of the 8-bit original, it's a real showcase of fancy Super Nintendo visual effects, and provides no shortage of great Mode 7 moments. Our choice picks include the giant Mode 7 Sarlacc-style worm boss that you have to fight from inside its gaping mouth, the superb robotic spider boss, and the neat into-the-screen racing/shooter sections. Developed by Factor 5, who is probably most well-known for the *Star Wars Rogue Squadron* series of Nintendo games, it's a truly fantastic shooter with visuals, imagination and set-piece moments that easily meet those high points of *Contra 3*, and Chris Hueslbeck's soundtrack is brilliant too. A polished and sensational shooter, it's just a shame that copies go for so much money these days.

F-Zero

Best Mode 7 moment: First track
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

While *F-Zero* may not be the most deep racing experience, if seen as Nintendo trying to show that its new console could easily handle an arcade-style racing game then it certainly achieves its goal. Said to be loosely connected to the obscure NES racer *Mach Rider*, which started its life as a plastic toy bike back when Nintendo was a toy maker, *F-Zero* was a perfect showcase for what the Mode 7 could do. Not only was *F-Zero* a launch game for the console but it was also the first game to utilise Mode 7, which here is used to create its stunning pseudo 3D tracks. Allowing the racing to feel incredibly fast and smooth as it wasn't pushing around intricate track and level designs – something which has remained a speed over detail hallmark for the series, nothing touched it in terms of exhilaration and visuals. It even left some arcade games eating its dust.





On The Ball

Best Mode 7 moment: Goal!!!
Year: 1992
Publisher: Taito Corporation
Developer: In-house

On The Ball is an on point SNES conversion of Taito's superb 1989 arcade puzzle game *Cameltry*. If you're unfamiliar with it, your objective is to steer a ball through a labyrinth and reach a goal before time expires. As the game progresses, the mazes become more devilish as more obstacles get thrown into the mix, including blocks that knock seconds off your time if you touch them, and traffic light gates that, well, we're sure you all know how traffic lights work. With your players rotating the maze rather than the ball to move it around, *On The Ball* was pretty much built for Mode 7. Thus it's a superb and faithful conversion, and though it could have benefitted from being a little bit longer, is still a must for puzzle fans.

Wings 2: Aces High

Best Mode 7 moment: The map
Year: 1992
Publisher: Namco
Developer: Malibu

Namco's *Wings 2: Aces High* was WWI placed and made great use of Mode 7. Piloting a WWI biplane, you have to complete a series of bombing and dog fight missions that build up to an aerial battle with the German Top Gun, Red Baron. Mode 7 is used here in two different ways: to create realistic 3D scrolling ground effects as you're flying through the air, and on the bombing missions to zoom the camera towards the floor as your plane flies towards it. The latter is particularly successful as the ground looks crisper the closer you are to it.





Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars



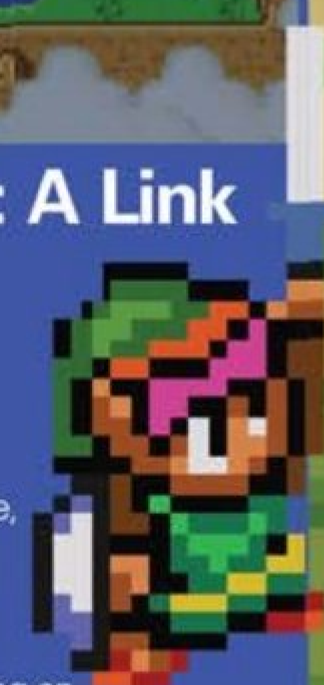
Best Mode 7 moment: Mine car challenge
Year: 1996
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Super Mario RPG is packed with mini-games, but this one is our favourite. Found at the end of the Molehill area, the Mode 7 mine car section serves as both a neat distraction and way to take you to the next section of the adventure. As the car moves on rails (obviously), players have to collect mushrooms and coins and jump any breaks in the track. There are also two Mode 7 side-scrolling sections that add a bit of extra variety to the action too.





The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past



Best Mode 7 moment: Map of Hyrule
Year: 1991
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Hyrule is such a big part of any *Zelda* adventure, so it seems fitting that Nintendo would want to do something special with the map screen. The Mode 7 map plays a prominent part in its gameplay and story, with players not only relying on it to get around the huge world but also allowing them to see the full effects and differences between its light and dark incarnations. It is without doubt one of the most iconic and fondly remembered game maps in history.

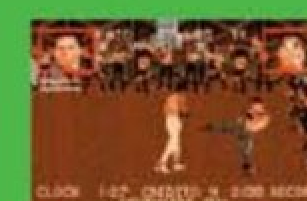
Mode 7 Mirrors

Mega Drive



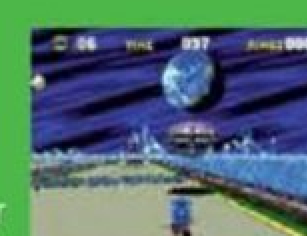
The Mega Drive is unable to do Mode 7 but there are games that show the console doing impress graphics tricks. For a similar rotational effect look at the top-down shooter *Red Zone* in action, or for some exhilarating into-the-screen shooting see *Burning Force*.

Atari Lynx



The Atari Lynx was capable of generating Mode 7-style scaling and rotation effects two years before the Super Nintendo. And the Lynx could actually even go a step better by being able to rotate and scale individual sprites, an effect noticeable in games like *Pit Fighter* and *California Games*.

Sega Mega CD



Sega's ill fated CD-Rom add-on for the Mega Drive was capable of Mode 7 effects. Perhaps the most famous example is the 3D bonus stages of *Sonic CD*, which saw Sonic running in a 3D rotating world trying to get those pesky Chaos Emeralds.

Pilotwings

Best Mode 7 moment: Free falling
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Whichever way you cut it, *Pilotwings* just wouldn't have been possible without Mode 7, and that's because here it isn't used to create a fancy background effect, boss or map, but – in a rare instance – an open-feeling world. By Nintendo choosing to base its game in a Flight School rather than the usual po-faced military scenario, it showed that flight sims could be universally fun and accessible. An early release for the Super Nintendo (it was a launch title for the console in the US and Europe), *Pilotwings* was unique. There was nothing really like it on the console market at the time, and it showed perhaps better than any other SNES game the immersive and engaging properties that Mode 7 brought to the table. If you removed Mode 7 from *Pilotwings* then the screen would be as empty and as black as space… or a better metaphor: nothingness. In *Pilotwings*, Mode 7 hardly ever sleeps. It's always in the background working away and showing off the impressive rotation and scaling effects it could generate. For all intents and purposes, *Pilotwings* is *Mode 7: The Videogame*.





Minority Report

If you want forgotten gems on household names and interesting games for rarely covered systems, this is the place. This month's Minority Report picks up the Oregon Trail, hitches a ride on the Crazy Train and plays an impressive-looking isometric shooter for the Game Gear



ARENA: MAZE OF DEATH

■ SYSTEM: GAME GEAR ■ DEVELOPER: EDEN ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1996

» GAME GEAR



» [Game Gear] *Arena* looks stunning. It's just a shame the gameplay doesn't match the visuals.

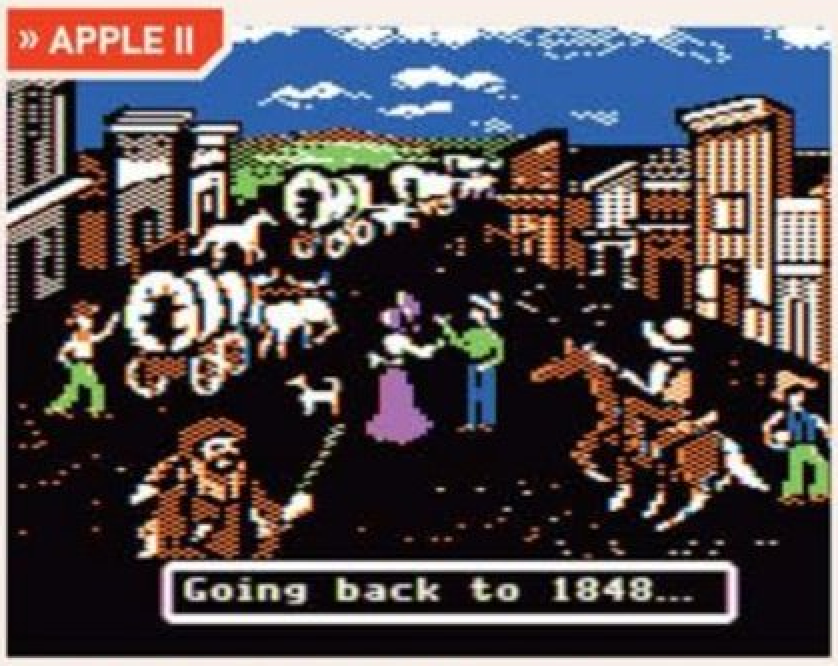
■ ***Arena: Maze Of Death*** **might sound like a Bruce Lee movie, but its action is more Willis than Lee. Developed by Eden Entertainment Software, whose less than impressive rap sheet includes the Mega Drive port of *Joe & Mac* and *RoboCop 3*, it stars an all-action hero type who must run around maze-like stages shooting everything in sight, all for the good of mankind, naturally.**

Released late in the Game Gear's life – six years after the launch of the console, in fact – *Arena* assuredly ranks as one of the best-looking shooters ever released for Sega's first handheld. Visually it's a bit of a marvel, in fact, with its detail-packed isometric levels and animated sprites giving it a strong resemblance to the 16-bit classic *Shadowrun*. Sadly, this is where comparisons end.

Set in a glum future, *Arena* tells the story of Guy Freelander, a lone man with a name like a car who's on a desperate mission to bring down a corrupt government using a sensitive videotape that shows an illegal meeting taking place between officials and a shady media corporation. As this incredibly original tale starts to unfold, you realise that *Arena*'s gameplay does little to push the envelope of the run-and-gun genre and its beauty is sadly only skin deep.

Guiding your hero through each stage, with the ultimate aim to reach a television studio where he plans to broadcast the tape for the whole world to see, *Arena*'s missions mainly involve running and gunning through samey-looking rooms in order to find different coloured key cards that grant access to the exit. Along the way

» APPLE II



» THE OREGON TRAIL

■ SYSTEM: APPLE II
■ DEVELOPER: MECC ■ YEAR: 1981

■ ***The Oregon Trail*** was first released in 1971 on an HP Time-Shared BASIC. Developed by Don Rawitsch, Bill Heinemann and Paul Dillenberger, it was created so Rawitsch could teach his students about the realities of 19th Century pioneer life. It became so popular that MECC, a company specialising in educational software, hired Rawitsch to flesh his project out. The end result was an engaging adventure that had the player managing resources, battling wolves, surviving diseases and generally trying to avoid dying from the many curveballs that nature threw at them.

» GAME BOY COLOR

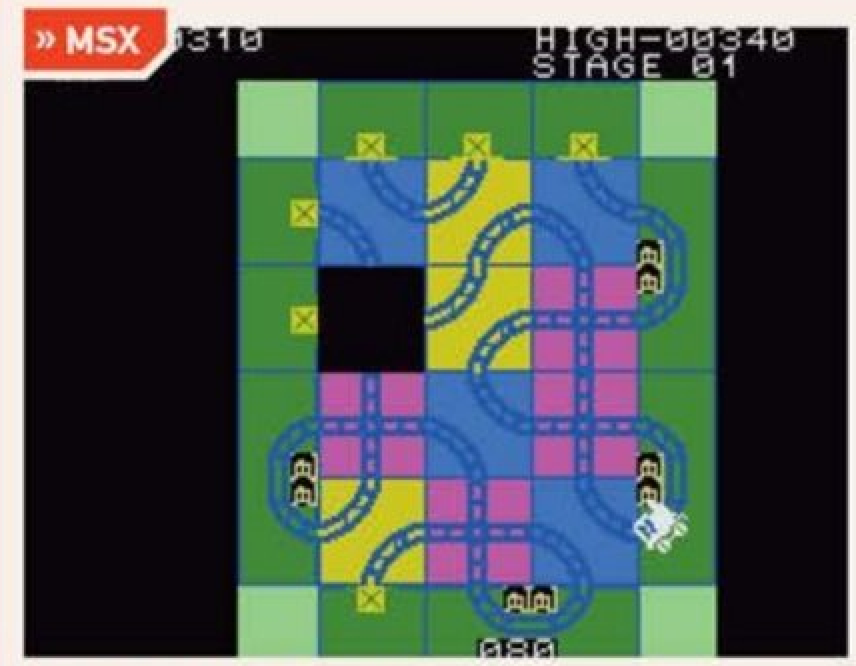


» STRANDED KIDS

■ SYSTEM: GAME BOY COLOR
■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI ■ YEAR: 1999

■ ***Stranded Kids*** **initially** appears to be a cute *Zelda* clone, but that's where the similarities end. It's a non-linear, extremely engaging adventure where your shipwrecked child must use their wits to survive on a deserted island. Food and water must be gathered and eaten, you must defend yourself against enemies, and you will have to craft a number of different items, from fishing rods to tools and weapons, in order to get by. It's a clever game that rewards exploration and has a host of different endings, offering plenty of replay value. It has received several Wii and DS sequels as *Lost In Blue*.

» MSX



» CRAZY TRAIN

■ SYSTEM: MSX
■ DEVELOPER: HIT BIT ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **This conversion of** Konami's *Loco-Motion* coin-op is a surprisingly decent adaptation. It's effectively a clever take on the sliding block puzzle, but this time each piece has rail tracks on it. By sliding the pieces together you can send your train around the track and hopefully pick up the waiting customers. Take too long and you'll receive time penalties and summon a 'Crazy Train', which you must avoid at all costs. While things start off sedately, you'll soon find it incredibly hard to appease waiting customers, which in turn throws more and more trains at you. A fast and frantic puzzler that's worth investigating.



» [Game Gear] The first few levels are a breeze but later ones ramp up the challenge.



» [Game Gear] Even if they look alike, this is nowhere near as good as *Shadowrun*.



» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- The Game Gear launched on 6 October 1990, and was Sega's first handheld games console
- The codename for the machine was Mercury
- The console launched in the US for $150 and £145 in the UK

you'll have to avoid the occasional booby trap, jump on the odd moving platform and gun down a few robotic civil servants, but for the most part you're doing a lot of running and plenty of backtracking.

The biggest problem we have with *Arena* is its overall lack of imagination. Enemies are bland and forgettable, and to make things worse don't really pose much of a threat at the start of the game. Despite the fact that they annoyingly respawn and ammo is limited – if you run out of bullets you're forced to attack using a knife that is difficult to aim with any precision – most of the time you can simply run right past them, only needing to resort to pulling your gun out if one happens to be standing in front of something you want, like an extra life or, more commonly, a key card. However, when you get to the later stages, the challenge climbs considerably. Enemies take more punishment, their bullets become faster, and the levels get trickier to navigate, and it's then that you really start to curse the fact that *Arena* doesn't have a map screen or on-screen health meter.

While it sounds like we're giving *Arena* a bit of a bashing, the visuals do go some way to rescuing it. Sure, it's not the deepest, most exciting or most innovative shooter on the Game Gear, but there are very few that match it on a visual level, and we'd be lying if we said it doesn't have its fun moments. So while *Maze Of Death* may have a few issues, it's still worth investigating if you're a fan of the genre or just simply want to see a Game Gear being put through its paces.



» [Game Gear] There is a small selection of weapons, but they're hardly unique – rapid fire and spread shot.

» FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM



» ALMANA NO KISEKI

■ SYSTEM: FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **We had high** hopes for *Almana No Kiseki*. Why? Well, it combines two awesome things in one game: *Castlevania* and *Indiana Jones*. It has a similar visual style and gameplay to the former but protagonist and story like the latter. Sadly, though, the quality and horrible controls kill the marriage. The problem lies with the hero's *Bionic Commando*-style grappling hook. While you'd think it would make getting around easier, it has the opposite effect in practice, as it can only be fired diagonally skyward. And respawning enemies don't help matters either. How Konami could mess up a *Castlevania* clone is beyond us.

» ATARI 2600

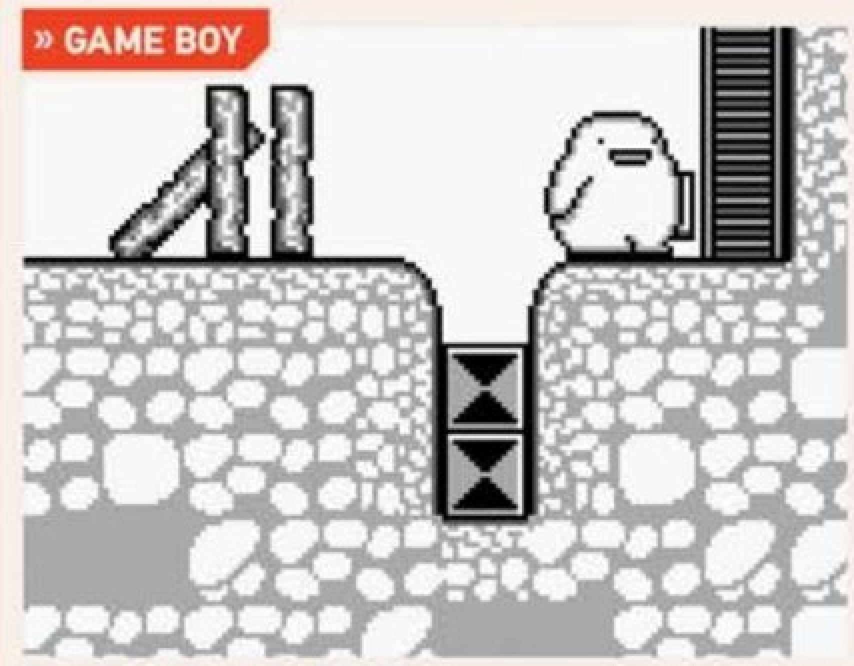


» TOWERING INFERNO

■ SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
■ DEVELOPER: WESTERN TECHNOLOGIES ■ YEAR: 1982

■ **Based on the** 1974 disaster movie of the same name, *Towering Inferno* is a superb 2600 game. Playing a firefighter, you must make your way up each floor of the skyscraper while avoiding flames and rescuing survivors by touching a square at the top of the screen and then getting back again. The brilliance lies in its presentation, though. Thanks to some effective use of sprite flickering, the look and behaviour of the flames are as real as those in any game we've played. The end result is a surprisingly tense and addictive game. For added challenge, try finishing it without using the hose.

» GAME BOY



» NOOBOW

■ SYSTEM: PC ENGINE
■ DEVELOPER: IREM ■ YEAR: 1992

■ **This charming puzzler** marks a change of pace for *R-Type* creator Irem. Starring a *Kirby*-style character from an obscure Japanese manga, you must navigate Noobow to the end of each stage by completing a series of place-object-here puzzles. Noobow isn't the nimblest of creatures, and so guiding him through the game's levels requires some canny block placement, lever-turning and the occasional bit of hang-gliding. Clearly designed with young gamers in mind, *Noobow* has little replay value. It's fun while it lasts, though, and as it's impossible to kill Noobow, it has a nice serene feel too.

BACK TO HALF-LIFE

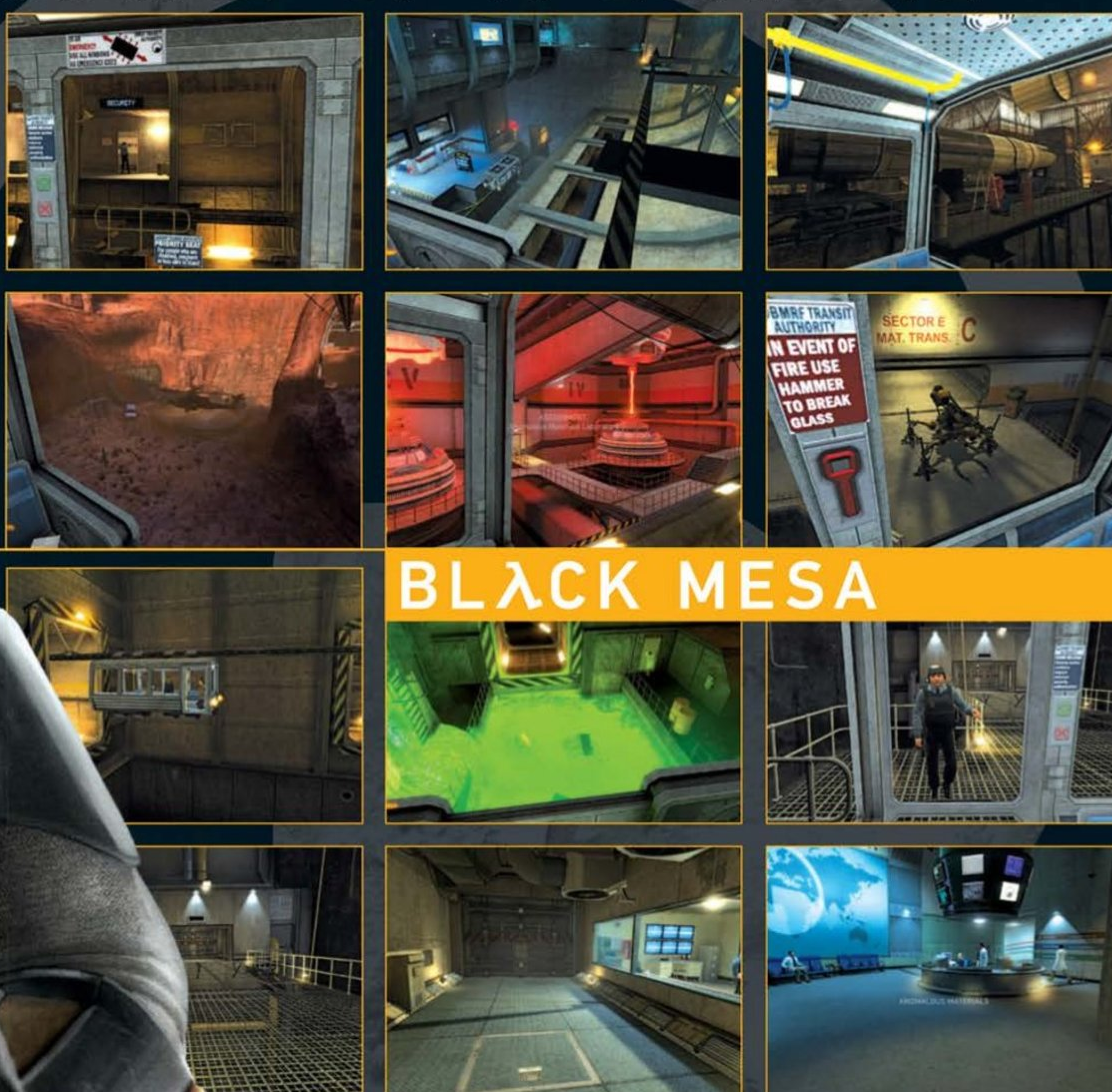
THE MAKING AND





Half-Life changed first-person shooters forever in 1998. Ian Dransfield spoke to writer Mark Laidlaw to discover the difficulties Valve faced while creating its groundbreaking game

BLACK
REMAKING OF A CLASSIC



BLACK MESA



Black Mesa may well change the PC modding scene forever. Ian Dransfield spoke to project lead Carlos Montero to discover how his team spent eight long years painfully rebuilding a groundbreaking game

HλLF-LIFE

FIVE HALF-LIFE ALTERNATIVES

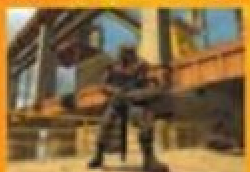
We reveal the other defining first-person shooters that were released in 1998

Unreal
Developer: Epic



Epic's game was phenomenally popular upon release, because it looked quite frankly stunning. The very first game to use the Unreal Engine may have been a simplistic shooter when compared directly to Valve's *Half-Life*, but its impact on the genre ended up becoming arguably just as important.

SiN
Developer: Ritual Entertainment



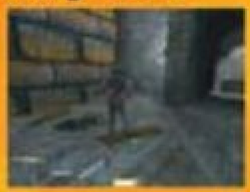
SiN boasted a surprising amount of innovation. It offered a large amount of interaction with the environment, and introduced many firsts to the genre from driving vehicles to knocking weapons out of an opponent's hands. What a pity then that it was let down by lengthy loading times and numerous bugs.

Turok 2: Seeds Of Evil
Developer: Iguana Entertainment



Turok 2 was one of the first N64 games to use the machine's add-on RAM Pack. It's also the first game in the *Turok* series (and the first videogame we can think of) to let you use the awesome brain drilling Cerebral Bore, and play in a multiplayer death match as a deadly velociraptor. Messy, but fun.

Thief: The Dark Project
Developer: Looking Glass Studios



Thief, like *Half-Life* and *SiN* was rife with innovation. The biggest difference was that the use of stealth was far more important than simple kills, the use of sound and light as gameplay mechanics was revolutionary at the time, while levels could be tackled in numerous different ways. A true classic.

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six
Developer: Red Storm Entertainment



While it doesn't go to the same levels as *Thief*, *Rainbow Six* is another game that favours stealth and tactics over offensive actions. Planning was just as important as the actual mission, while the speed in which your soldiers could be dispatched gave you a fear that wasn't found in similar games.

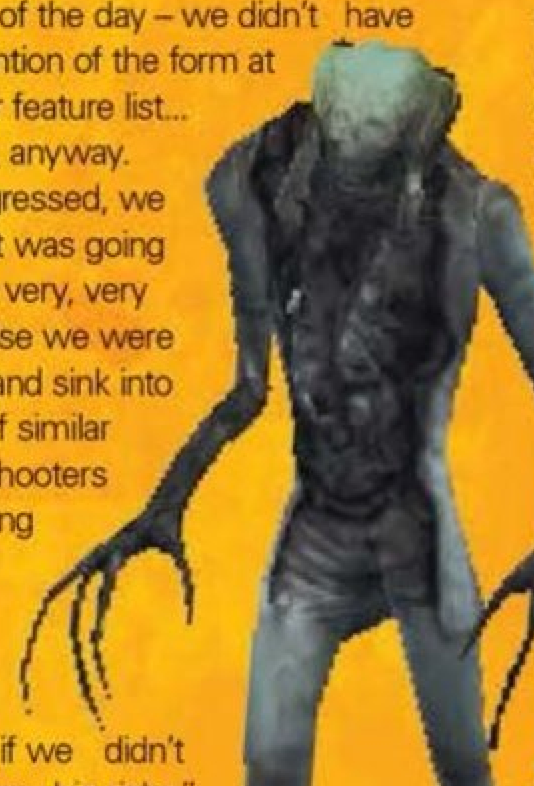
If you're going to start a company creating videogames, you want to make sure the first thing you release is going to make itself heard – you want to make sure people *notice* what you're putting out there. In the case of Valve, its first release was one of the defining first-person shooters of… well, ever. Not a bad debut, it has to be said.

It's not like the original *Half-Life* was an unknown quantity: it was a game with some level of hype behind it. People were already interested; they had already upgraded their PCs and marked their calendars for release day. It wasn't a total surprise that the game ended up being brilliant. What *was* a surprise was just *how* good *Half-Life* ended up being: a game that was expected to be some fun, *Half-Life* ended up being better than pretty much anything that came before it – and a lot that came after.



» [PC] *Half-Life* did a fantastic job of dropping you into a believable world.

As Valve's own Marc Laidlaw told **Retro Gamer**: "*Half-Life* had its genesis at the same time as Valve: it was intended to sell enough to fund more games, and put Valve on the map as a legitimate contender in the game industry." Though – at first – it wasn't trying to be all-conquering, as he explained. "Our ambitions were initially modest, and we wanted it to be modestly different from the other games of the day – we didn't have radical reinvention of the form at the top of our feature list… or not at first, anyway. As work progressed, we realized that it was going to have to be very, very different or else we were going to fail, and sink into the morass of similar first person shooters that were being made at the time. It was impossible to stand out and succeed if we didn't try to take some big risks."



It's easy to look back at *Half-Life* through contemporary eyes and see a rather quaint FPS: backwards in some elements, featuring little you don't see in genre stable mates. But it was different. Radically so, even in very small ways, as Marc pointed out: "Starting the game without a weapon in your hand, or any weapon at all for the first 20 minutes or so – that was quite a scary risk to take when we looked at all the other similar games of the day, and wondered if we would lose our audience if we didn't let them start shooting things immediately." But early signs of Valve's particular manner of thinking won through: "At the same time, we thought our audience was a lot smarter than was commonly supposed."

But even with all the intelligence, ability and time to create that Valve had, it wasn't *expected* that *Half-Life* would be a defining experience for many gamers: "Expectations for its performance were realistically low. Although people on the team had shipped software before, no one had shipped a game. It's hard to make anything for the first time. I would say that instead of ambition, we had vision. We would get together and talk about the experience we wanted to create, and everyone seemed to share this ideal of something quite a bit beyond any game we had ever played before. Eventually the game we were making began to converge on these visions of the game we had imagined ourselves making."

But of course that makes it sound far too easy and straightforward, and Marc let us in on a rather startling fact: *Half-Life* *wasn't very good*… at first. "When we had built quite a bit of the game, we played through the whole thing we had created and realized that we were seriously in danger of underdelivering. It was a quite ordinary corridor shooter with rooms full of monsters that popped out of hiding places once the doors were locked. We

Turn to page 76

> [At first] it was an ordinary corridor shooter with rooms full of monsters



» [PC] *Half-Life*'s intro was revolutionary at the time, delivering an epic cinematic feel that had never been seen before.



» [PC] It's easy to laugh at *Half-Life*'s crude textures now, but they nevertheless helped to convey a living, breathing world.



» [PC] The introduction of the Marine Recon team sent in to clear up Black Mesa really highlighted *Half-Life*'s superb AI.

BLACK MESA

How much would it cost to put together a team of around 40 people to work for eight years on a total remake – no reused assets at all – of one of the best first-person shooters ever created? "Everyone worked for free," says Carlos Montero, project lead on *Black Mesa*, offer an explanation as to just how you get people to work for so long, to such a high standard, for no payment: "The key was to hire people who really cared about the project. There were many instances where we turned down fantastically talented people, because we could tell they weren't committed. Likewise, we hired some very junior people specifically because of how committed we could tell they were."

Black Mesa was announced in 2004, though initially as two entirely separate mods. They were soon brought together to meet their common goal of faithfully recreating the original game in a manner befitting a classic. But this was its origin – a team of unpaid enthusiasts from all over the world, some who had never met (and likely will never meet), coming together in shared disappointment at Valve's release of *Half-Life: Source*. Oh, and of course the drive to create and to make something worth playing.

But people had to wait to get themselves some action, with eight years passing before a finished public release. It had been the subject of derision, confusion and, as with a lot on the internet, anger. But why *did* *Black Mesa* take so long? "There are three basic variables to making a good product: quality, scope and time. We couldn't change scope, and we wouldn't sacrifice quality, so it took more time," Carlos says. "I also think there are a lot of misconceptions about the amount of time it took. Sure, years are years, but you have to take into account the amount of man-hours put into the game. A small team working part-time is going to have to take many times longer than a large team working full-time. It's simple math, the large team can put in many more man-hours at a much higher rate."



1 [PC] The Half-Life 2 engine allows Gordon to interact with far more people.

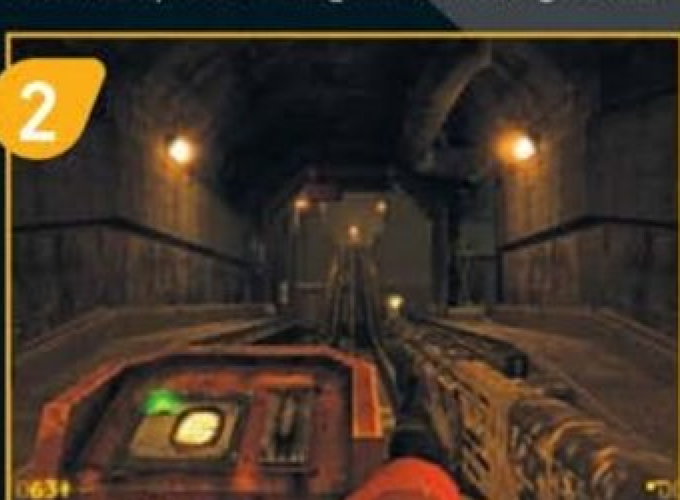
> A small team working part-time is going to have to take longer than a large team working full-time. It's simple math

This wait saw the *Black Mesa* project placing on *Wired*'s none-too-coveted 'vapourware of the year' list two years running, in both 2009 and 2010. Demoralising, surely? Not as much as you might think, as Carlos pointed out: "It was a huge bummer to see them do that. We are big fans of *Wired*, and we knew that this represented a negative view that people had about our project. But in the end, I think it made us more determined to turn it around than ever before."

Turning it around, though, wasn't a case of taking the original *Half-Life* and simply making it sparklier. This was, in effect, a new game built from nothing – and as such there were temptations to rebuild the foundations in a slightly different way. But it was never wanton, as Carlos told us: "It was always a tricky balance when discussing and deciding what we needed to keep and what we should remove." Surely we could wave goodbye to the platform sections though? "While removing them may have made one portion of fans happy, it likely would've outraged others. Unless we thought it was a clear win/win, we usually erred on the side of not breaking nostalgia."

Similarly, the team dabbled in adding new features but stopped short of fundamentally changing the experience: "We prototyped a few things that we ended up cutting. Some even made it in as optional elements. For example, in the options menu you can enable 'Headcrab Face

Turn to page 77



2 » [PC] You don't mess with a classic bit of gaming, so *Black Mesa*'s intro simply ups the texture resolution to dramatic effect.



3 » [PC] The team have slipped a number of in-jokes into *Black Mesa*. The microwave now contains a headcrab.

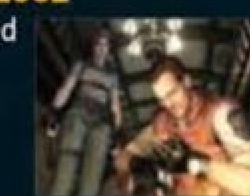


4 » The AI in *Black Mesa* is every bit as good as *Half-Life*'s meaning Gordon really has an epic fight on his hands.

FIVE OF THE BEST REMAKES

Black Mesa isn't the only quality remake out there: here are five more

Resident Evil, Gamecube, 2002



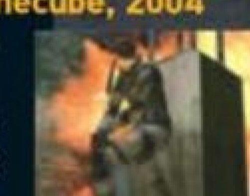
Capcom wanted to bring all of the *Resident Evil* games to one console, and it decided the Gamecube would be that console. To celebrate we received this: a remake of the 1996 original with roughly 70 per cent new content and – to this day – some of the finest looking backgrounds we've ever seen.

Punch-Out! Wii, 2009



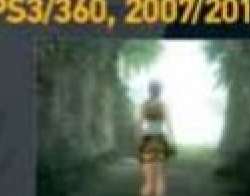
Remakes can go a few different ways, but *Punch-Out!* was on the path of 'make it like the last game, but better looking'. Rather than bolting on numerous extra – pointless – features, the devs at Next Level Games stayed very faithful to the source material. This one tickled the nostalgia gland quite heavily.

Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes, Gamecube, 2004



We can ignore the fact that Naomi Hunter suddenly went American in *Twin Snakes*, if only because it was such a fantastic remake of the original *MGS*. While not as radical a reinvention as the *Resi* remake, *Twin Snakes* had enough new elements about it to make it stand out as an entirely different offering.

Tomb Raider Anniversary, PS2/PSP/PC/Wii/PS3/360, 2007/2011



When Eidos handed dev duties of Lara Croft's games to Crystal Dynamics, the world gasped. But once *Legend* had been released, they clamoured for the talented team to re-do the original game – and that's just what happened with *Anniversary*. A skilful recreation of the original classic *Tomb Raider*.

The Secret Of Monkey Island special editions, PS3/PC/360/iPad, 2009/2010



It's difficult to pick one or the other, such is the quality in both (and loyalty is still split between the two games). A full graphical, musical and control overhaul combined with voice acting and high production values makes both of the *Monkey Island* remakes utterly essential.



5

» [PC] With so many dangerous monsters to contend with, topping up your health was essential.



» [PC] These nasty foes are one of the earliest antagonists, constantly assaulting you as you try to escape the facility.





6

» [PC] Valve is a master at creating dramatic moments in its games, and this key scene from *Half-Life* is no different.

knew we could do better, and that if we didn't, we would be lambasted. So we pulled everything back, withdrew into a series of design cabal sessions that felt endless at the time (even though in reality this was probably just a matter of weeks), and started again – almost from scratch." Pay attention, other developers: "We made sure that every area had a number of people thinking about it, packing it with a density of experiences and surprises and challenges and combat situations that I think people associate with the *Half-Life* style of gameplay. The response to these changes was so positive that we felt we had a chance of succeeding – although certainly we never expected anything close to the reception the game ultimately got."

Even in its heyday, *Half-Life* had detractors – and many negative but fair points were made. After all, first-person platforming has only ever worked approximately three times in the history of ever, and Valve's first game is not one of those times. And Xen. Oh, Xen. Something that has gone down in the gaming dictionary as 'How to try your hardest to ruin one of the best games ever made right at the end' (it's not the most succinct dictionary).

Marc agreed there were issues – things he and the team would have taken a second look at were they to go back and remake



The end of Half-Life was rushed, put off too late to really refine it

the original: "Introducing the longjump immediately before the Xen sequence, so that you never really have a chance to train in its use without failing. Better yet, redesign the entire Xen experience so that it worked more like the game that came before it: no longjump at all." And yes, the Xen section was bad for a reason: "Everything about the end of the game was rushed, put off too late to really refine it or respond to feedback in any real way, even though we were quite aggressive about playtesting." Turns out people weren't just being hyper-critical of a masterpiece: they were pointing out genuine flaws in *Half-Life*'s makeup.

But that's not to paint the game in a negative light, because the finished product can still hold its head high to this day as one of the greats, and Marc realises this: "It is an honour to have worked on *Half-Life*; to be in that particular place, at that particular time in the industry when it was possible to build such a game for the first time. I am sure that other designers before us wanted to make such a game, but we were lucky enough to be in the position to do it." Even the modern day FPS situation of certain iterative franchises and a total lack of inspiration or risk-taking doesn't get him down: "I see game trends going in cycles; I don't think there's anything terrible about where we're at right now – good stuff is inspirational for other designers, and the less good is too, in that it ends up as mulch, convincing someone 'I can do better'. When we were making *Half-Life*, we said that quite a lot."

Speaking of 'mulch', *Half-Life: Source* was (not to put too fine a point on it) a waste of time. So it's great to see the team of enthusiasts put out *Black Mesa* like it has. But we had to know just what Marc – one of the folks involved in development of the game *BM* remakes – thought of this team of upstart modders. "It's interesting to think of classic games getting what amounts to a cover treatment. Camper Van Beethoven did a complete cover of the Fleetwood Mac album, *Tusk*. I had never listened to the original but loved the CVB version. So I'm looking forward to playing the *Black Mesa* team's interpretation, and it is interesting to think that a lot of people who never played *Half-Life* will get to experience something of the game in this cover version. Maybe they will go back and check out the original, or maybe that just turns into mulch itself. Regardless, who doesn't love a good cover of a favourite song? I think there's room in the industry for all these different versions and visions." λ



7

» [PC] There are all manner of nasty enemies in *Half-Life*. Fortunately you have the firepower to take them out.

TEN OF THE BEST MODS

Technically, Black Mesa isn't one, but that doesn't mean we can't point you at some great Half-Life mods



Day Of Defeat
Since being updated to *Day Of Defeat: Source*, the original game is still a mod that should be celebrated. Bringing with it objective-based multiplayer in a Second World War setting, *Day Of Defeat* was a breath of fresh air in a stale genre of online shooters, even if it does feel a little stale itself these days.



Counter-Strike
Have you heard of this? Something about terrorists winning, or something. *Counter-Strike* is one of the most popular and successful mods ever created – the series has now sold over 30 million units. Though admittedly that's because Valve took over. Still, *Counter-Strike* is brilliant.



They Hunger
It's impossible to think that Valve played through *They Hunger* and didn't draw inspiration from it for the Ravenholm section of *Half-Life 2*, such is the fear-inducing nature of this particular mod. A writer, a crash, zombies, anachronistic technology: it's a fine package and can still send chills up your spine.



Gunman Chronicles
The missing child of the *Half-Life* mods world, *Gunman Chronicles* saw an officially sanctioned full release in 2000. Since then, the sci-fi western shooter has all but disappeared from Valve's records, being unavailable on Steam as it is. You can still pick it up independently, of course, but it's odd not to see it available digitally.



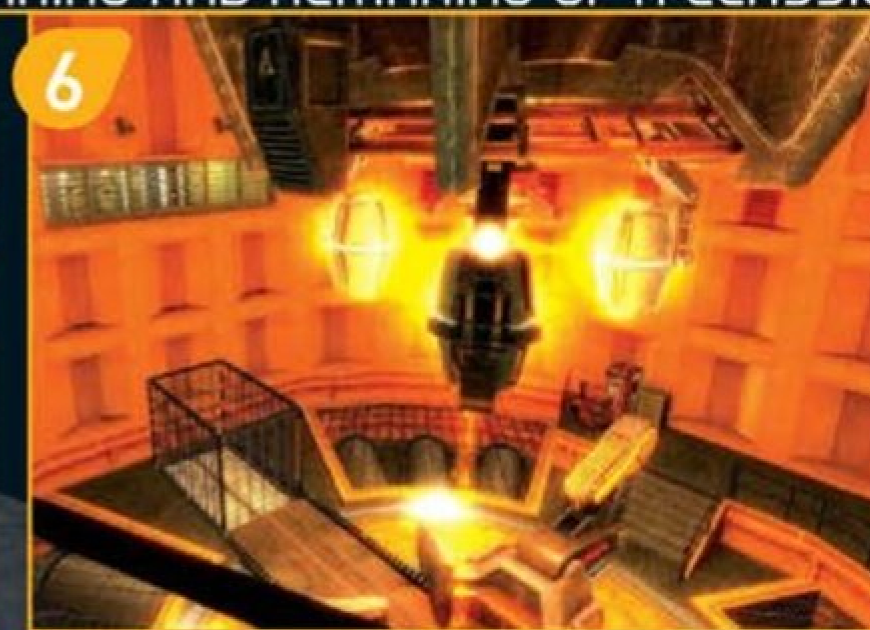
Natural Selection
One of the more interesting mods out there, *Natural Selection* blends traditional FPS action with RTS sensibilities. Two teams face off against each other – humans and aliens – in a couple of different game modes. Building, move orders, multiple abilities and so on make the experience unique. Really good fun.



» [PC] Your suit quickly drains power as your journey progresses, so be sure to regularly top it up.



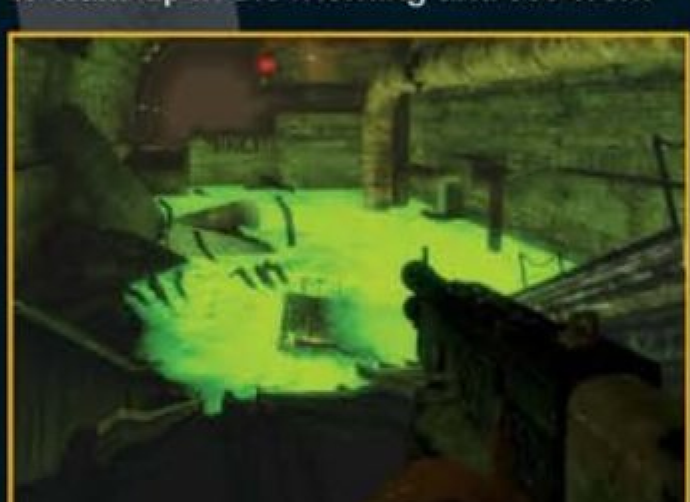
» [PC] You'll regularly get help from other people stuck in the facility, so be sure to make the most of it.



» [PC] The moment when Gordon Freeman's world goes to complete crap has never looked better.

Latching' features, where headcrabs will sometimes randomly attach to your face and you'll have to pry them off! These were fun, but ultimately we didn't feel like they fit well and either removed them or disabled them by default." And reigning in the need to bring your own elements to the game wasn't even the hardest part of *Black Mesa*'s creation – as Carlos told us, it was "understanding Valve's philosophies and quality level well enough that we could try and reproduce it. This spread across all disciplines, from level design, to choreography, to audio." For the record, Valve isn't the easiest studio to follow in terms of these developmental practices.

Which must have made things harder for a team working apart from each other to unite with a coherent, disciplined development. But Carlos saw the positives in working like this: "We fed off of each other. Decentralisation can actually be a boon sometimes. It's nice to wake up in the morning and see work that someone else was doing while you were sleeping!" But that never stopped elements of negativity from creeping in, however fleeting: "Of course we had our moments of doubt, but in the end we were just determined to share what we had done with the world. We knew we had something special on our hands, and we wanted to get it out there."



» [PC] It's amazing how much impressive lighting effects can enhance an already atmospheric game.

But there's the sort of special a creator thinks of their creation, and the sort of special when you can directly compare it to what it was based on. How did Carlos think *Black Mesa* measured up to *Half-Life*? "I would say that I believe it measures up very well. I have heard what I wanted to hear from many fans: that it brought back the same sense of amazement and immersion they felt when they played the original. For many of us, this was the goal, and we hit it."

The team had been working so long on *Black Mesa* that it would have to tackle two fronts: it would have to live up to the promises it initially set to silence the cries of 'vapourware' and suchlike, and it would have to look, feel and play phenomenally well to live up to the expectations that build with eight years of waiting. What was finally released to the public in September of 2012, while technically incomplete (missing the Xen section, as if anybody really minded), *was* phenomenal. It hit both fronts with confidence, providing us with a beautiful, atmospheric, involving and – most importantly – faithful recreation of the game we fell in love with back in 1998. But will such a talented team of pros, semi-pros and amateurs stick around to remake something else? Will we see a *Black Mesa 2*? Carlos was unsure: "This remains to be seen. Aside from the plans of the team, I think everyone will have their own personal decisions to make." Whatever happens, they can all be proud of what they produced – even if we did have to wait for a while.

But one question remains: why, oh why, oh why, did we see repeated appearances from Rotherham's finest children's entertainers the Chuckle Brothers throughout *Black Mesa*? Naturally **Retro Gamer** was on the case, and put this to Carlos: "We have quite a few European team members. I'm not sure who snuck that in exactly, but we thought it was great when we saw it – so we left it in! We're glad so many people have enjoyed seeing it." And that explains that.



» [PC] The *Half-Life 2* engine allows explosions to look better than ever.





Team Fortress Classic
Originally a *Quake* mod introducing team-based multiplayer elements, *TFC* was pretty much a proof-of-concept created by a couple of new-hires at Valve. It's ended up a monster that cannot be stopped, dwarfed only by its sequel (which was long enough coming) and the many hats it, quite literally, wears.



Sven Co-op
Released in 1999 and still under development, *Sven Co-op* is still popular and fun to this day. It's a multiplayer co-operative mod (as if that wasn't apparent) seeing players tackling challenges together. It's also one of the oldest mods still updated, having been around longer than even *Team Fortress Classic*.



Opposing Force/Blue Shift
Technically these are officially sanctioned expansion packs, but it's impossible not to mention them thanks to the impact they had on the studio making them. Both were developed by Gearbox Software which, as a result of their quality, has gone on to do great things of its own. Well done there then.



Heart Of Evil
You don't see too many games based during the Vietnam war, and you certainly don't see many that tackle it in such a thoughtful, provocative way. *Heart Of Evil* does the former, not the latter. Combining *Apocalypse Now* with *The Evil Dead* may seem like a good idea for a videogame, and it is.



Garry's Mod
Okay, so this is actually cheating a bit as this is actually a *Half-Life 2* mod – but there's too much love for *Garry's Mod* for it to be ignored. No objectives, no levels, no cut-scenes or arduous dialogue to sit through: this is just a mod made for mucking about with the Source engine. And it's absolutely wonderful.

THE CLASSIC GAME

SONIC 3



Developed in the US by a Sonic Team stationed at the academic-sounding Sega Technical Institute, *Sonic 3* was the most action-packed episode in the trilogy, containing some of the best set piece moments, boss battles, and co-operative gameplay, not to mention the most annoying level select cheat in game history. And though *Sonic 3* was short, ended abruptly and didn't really innovate to the same extent as its predecessors, Stuart Hunt still thinks the third time was also the charm.

1 *Trainers*
This classic power-up imbues Sonic and Tails with faster speed, making it the most fun of the lot.



2 *Sparkles*
Another oldie, this monitor offers temporary invincibility and plays *that* catchy tune.



3 *Bubble*
Allows Sonic and Tails to breathe underwater, bounce on the ground and deflect projectiles.



4 *Flame*
Turns Sonic into a fireball to launch across the screen. Also acts as a shield that can deflect projectiles.



5 *Lightning bolt*
Lets Sonic perform a slight double jump, sucks in rings and, yes, deflects projectiles.



6 *Robotnik*
Unsubtle booby trap monitor that causes Sonic and Tails to lose all their collected rings.



MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



Striking that balance

Sonic is all about speed. However, to make a good *Sonic* game it's essential that the speed and stages work together. Go too far in one direction and you run the risk of harming its flow. Lean too much the opposite way and you're in danger of creating a shallow experience. All the 16-bit *Sonic* games get that balance pretty much spot on, but *Sonic 3* probably does it best. Not only are its levels packed full of variety and set piece moments, but it's incredibly fast too. The visuals and music are as good as ever, Tails really hits his prime, and it marks the debut of Knuckles the Echidna too.

DEVELOPMENT STORIES



Behind the scenes

There are some interesting stories from *Sonic 3*'s development. The most famous is that Michael Jackson wrote some of the music for the game. However, due to the controversy surrounding him at the time, they weren't used. Another important development in the game's genesis is that *Sonic 3* was originally going to include the content that would later arrive in *Sonic & Knuckles* before Sega split the game into two parts due to time and cost concerns. This division may explain why *Sonic 3* ends so abruptly and is shorter than *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, with just six acts.

BEST CHARACTER



All hail Tails

Though *Sonic 3* hosts the first appearance of Knuckles and made Sonic more badass through a selection of new shields, this award goes to Tails. Sega really thought about how to enhance Sonic's sidekick, issuing both heroes with a unique special power that was actuated by pressing the jump button while airborne: Sonic could generate a short energy burst that made him invincible for a split second, while Tails could swim, take to the sky and reach areas that Sonic couldn't. Imbuing individuality into the duo was the genius of *Sonic 3*, making Mario and Luigi's relationship feel dull by comparison.

BEST STAGE



Icecap Zone

Sega looked at every aspect of the previous two games and thought how they could be improved. To this end, one of *Sonic 3*'s biggest strengths lies in its level design. There are some great stages in *Sonic 3*, and picking a favourite isn't easy, but one of the best is definitely Icecap Zone. Despite being a staple of the platform genre, ice stages didn't appear in *Sonic 1* or *2*, and *Sonic 3* ensured the series' first attempt was a belter. Kicking off with a snowboarding set piece, it had great imagination and one of the best music tracks in the game. Look out for the rather subtle night-to-day cycle too.

BEST BOSS



Hydro Fun Park

Sonic 3 has some of the best bosses in the series, and every act ends with one. For us, the best is Robotnik's weapon used against Sonic and Tails at the end of Hydrocity. What makes this battle so memorable is that it uses the environment to really great effect. Robotnik's vehicle utilises a fan to create a big rising whirlpool that sucks in Sonic and Tails. The doctor then drops grenades into the water that detonate and create cool water splashes that Sonic and Tails must use to launch themselves to the height needed to hit his contraption and bring him down… until the next zone.

STANDOUT MOMENT



It's snow time

Yes, it's a predictable choice, but the snowboard ride from the beginning of Icecap Zone gets our vote. It's all style and sub-zero substance, with you unable to do much during this exhilarating set piece moment, but it serves as a cool bit of exposition for the stage, as after landing on this conveniently placed snowboard and whizzing down the mountain, looking all cool and edgy, Sonic collides with a wall, awakening an avalanche that traps him inside a deep, icy cavern and leaves him to find his way out. That'll teach him to wear nothing but a pair of red sneakers and some gloves.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** SONIC TEAM
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM

What the press said… ages ago

MEAN MACHINES SEGA – 94%

"Sonic's back! Back! Back! This game re-establishes him as King of the Hill, Top of the Heap and Life Emperor of the Platform Universe. Huzzah! Huzzah!"





What we think

Sonic 3 might sit in the shadow of *Sonic CD* and *Sonic 2*, but there's no denying it's a great entry in the series with some of the best stages and boss battles in the Mega Drive games. Our only issue with it is that it leaves you wanting more.



THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF KIRBY

Now celebrating his 20th anniversary, Kirby has had a rocky history, starring in a host of games that range from terrible to genius. Ashley Day finds out why it isn't easy being pink

Though he's currently celebrating his 20th anniversary and has appeared in a vast number of games, Kirby isn't quite in the A-list of Nintendo stars alongside Mario, Link and Samus, to the extent that his 20th anniversary Wii anthology isn't even confirmed for release in the UK at the time of writing. So just why is Kirby relegated to the B tier of Nintendo heroes?

Maybe it's because he's an anonymous looking blob of a character; a blank slate whose personality is defined more by the enemies he eats and absorbs than anything inherent in himself. Maybe it's because he began life on the Game Boy rather than the NES or SNES, creating the impression that he's somehow less of a prime-time star. Maybe it's because all of his games are so easy that they feel like they were designed for infants alone rather than the all-ages audience of other Nintendo games. Or maybe it's his track record. Kirby seems to have more cancelled games behind him than any other Nintendo character, and those that do make it onto shelves are of wildly varying quality. The words hit and miss were practically defined by Kirby.

Yet despite all these flaws, Nintendo's unlikely mascot endures. Combined sales of *Kirby* games total a whopping 33 million. He's proved popular enough to gain his own animated TV show. The desk of this particular **Retro Gamer** writer is decorated with not one but two Kirby plushes. And anyone who plays *Super Smash Bros.* with any sense of competition has likely banned Kirby from play for being too darned impossible to beat.

Twenty years into his career, Kirby is defined by one thing: adaptability. Not just in his patented ability to consume enemies and take on their powers and appearance but also in his comfort across a multitude of gaming genres and styles. His classic platformers remain a constant but the round form of Kirby has also seen him take the form of a pinball and golf ball. He's starred in a *Breakout* clone, a *Marble Madness* style game and one of the most esoteric racers ever created. The little guy has even appeared in a game made entirely from wool.

"Kirby began life as a sprite called Popopo in a game called Twinkle Popopo, which became Kirby's Dreamland"

This versatility almost certainly dates all the way back to Kirby's origins. Created by Masahiro Sakurai of HAL Laboratory in 1992, Kirby actually began life as a placeholder sprite called Popopo in a game called *Twinkle Popopo*… Which eventually became *Kirby's Dreamland*. His placeholder nature perfectly explains Kirby's appearance – a simple round blob with stubby limbs and basic facial features has got to be one of the easiest and quickest characters to draw. As development of the game progressed however, Sakurai gradually fell in love with the placeholder design and decided to keep him.

Popopo was eventually renamed Kirby, though Sakurai claims to not remember why. Some speculate that he was named



» [Game Boy] *Kirby's Block Ball* is one of the few unique interpretations of *Breakout* that exist. Well done, Kirby!



» [Game Boy] *Pinball Land* is part of a lineage of fantastic HAL pinball games, including *Revenge Of The Gator*.

after the Kirby vacuum cleaner company, due to his ability to suck up enemies and other objects, while others suggest he is named after the lawyer John Kirby who represented Nintendo in the *Donkey Kong/King Kong* dispute with Universal Studios. The latter theory is certainly the most likely, given that Mario was also named after a close associate of Nintendo's.

Though *Kirby's Dreamland* featured a number of series hallmarks, including Kirby's ability to suck in and spit out objects, as well as the now iconic and oft repeated tree boss of the first stage, his more popular copy ability was not yet present. Similarly, though Sakurai had envisioned Kirby as a pink character, his debut on Game Boy didn't demonstrate this characteristic and this aspect of the character design was lost outside of Japan, with Nintendo's western arm depicting Kirby as a completely white character on the game's box art and other marketing materials. With origins like this, it's easy to see how Kirby became such a versatile, adaptable hero, capable of appealing to a wide group of people.

Sakurai originally envisioned Kirby as the star of a basic game that anyone could play, and it certainly shows in Dreamland. His ability to float across an entire stage made most of the game free of conflict or obstacle and the whole thing could be completed in under an hour. Fortunately, the NES sequel *Kirby's Adventure* added some much needed complexity in addition to Kirby's true bright pink colour. This game, released in 1993, introduced the ability to copy the powers of the enemies Kirby consumed and also introduced a slightly more complex level structure and a host of mini-game rooms, which extended the size of the game enough to necessitate a battery-backed save function. It also expanded the cast of characters, the first game's penguin villain King Dedede now joined by anti-hero Meta Knight, who would go on to become one of the most popular and iconic Kirby characters.



» [NES] The Kirby we know and love today really took shape with Kirby's Adventure

KIRBY'S SPIN-OFFS

Kirby has had almost as many spin-off games as he has main platform games. Some may even say that the spin-offs are his best works… And you know what, they'd be right

Kirby's Pinball Land
Game Boy, 1993



Actually the second *Kirby* game ever made, Pinball Land proved just how versatile a character Kirby is. This remains one his best games. Programmed by Satoru Iwata at HAL, it followed the developer's other pinball games, *Rollerball* and *Revenge Of The Gator*, and built upon a great track record for multi-level pinball tables that did things totally impossible in the real thing. Three tables, each with their own high score board made this an infinitely replayable classic.

Kirby's Dream Course
SNES, 1994



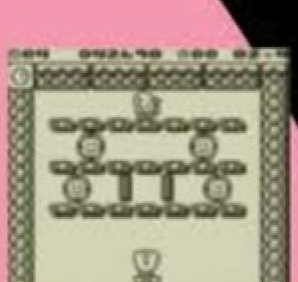
Originally conceived as a mini-golf game called *Special Tee Shot*, this evolved into something more interesting. In *Dream Course*, players hit Kirby around an isometric golf course, taking out any enemy he strikes, with the final one transforming into the hole. Each hit takes one life while each enemy struck replaces one, rewarding accuracy. The game featured eight courses, with eight holes, as well as another four two-player only eight-hole courses.

Kirby's Ghost Trap
SNES, 1995



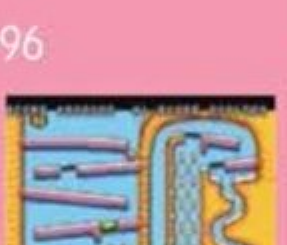
Also known as *Kirby's Avalanche* in the US, *Ghost Trap* is a port of Japan's *Super Puyo Puyo*. Before the *Puyo Puyo* series became well known in the west, developer Compile licenced it to other publishers, who would apply a more well-known property over the top, like Sega's *Mean Bean Machine*, starring Sonic's Dr Robotnik. *Ghost Trap* used sprites and music from *Kirby's Adventure* and *Kirby's Dream Course* but is otherwise a *Puyo Puyo* game.

Kirby's Block Ball
Game Boy, 1995



Yes, *Block Ball* suffered from the same clunky controls of all non-analogue *Breakout* clones but it made up for it with some unique mechanics. Hitting A at the same time as striking a ball would inflate it into a full-sized Kirby, capable of hitting more bricks at once and with more power, while boss battles used four paddles at once, one on each edge of the screen. A huge battery-backed adventure and tons of mini-games made it more than just a simple arcade clone.

Kirby's Toy Box
Super Famicom, 1996



A series of mini-games that were broadcast on the Super Famicom's obscure Satellaview add-on, *Kirby's Toy Box* included eight mini-games, themed around Kirby as a ball, and included such simple games as baseball, pinball and pachinko. Though there was also a nice little artillery clone called *Cannonball*. The series was designed to promote the cartridge release of *Kirby Super Star* and can now only be played via emulation.

Kirby Star Stacker
Game Boy, 1997



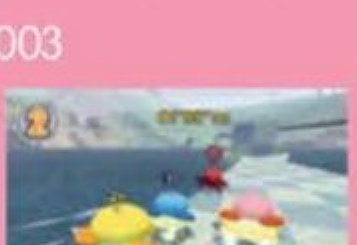
Every Nintendo mascot seems to get their own puzzle game at some point and this was Kirby's (remember that *Ghost Trap* was really a *Puyo Puyo* game). Sadly, *Star Stacker* wasn't very good. With gameplay between *Mario & Yoshi* and Sega's *Baku Baku Animal*, it wasn't simple enough to be instantly accessible but nowhere near complex enough to be engrossing. A Super Famicom remake was made in 1998 but had few improvements.

Kirby Tilt 'n' Tumble
Game Boy Color, 2000



Game Boy Color never really got a proper *Kirby* platformer (a DX remake of *Dream Land 2* was announced but never released) but it did get this interesting curiosity. Featuring a motion sensor in the cartridge itself, it played like a ball-bearing maze game by tilting the entire handheld around. Sadly it never got a European release and the tilt technology makes it highly unlikely that we'll see a Virtual Console re-release any time soon.

Kirby Air Ride
GameCube, 2003



Masahiro Sakurai returned to the *Kirby* series after several years away for this odd racer in which the only button was a brake, designed to build up tension on corners before letting go to slingshot out of them. An interesting but unsatisfying idea. A wealth of bonus content, and the way it was unlocked, however, influenced later Sakurai games *Super Smash Bros* and *Kid Icarus: Uprising*.

Two years later Kirby returned to the Game Boy in *Kirby's Dream Land 2*. Incorporating the copy ability from the NES game, it also expanded the gameplay possibilities by adding three of Kirby's mates to the mix. Rick the hamster, Coo the owl and Kine the fish may be three of the worst names and least memorable characters in Nintendo history but they at least prove invaluable in *Dream Land 2*. Each carries Kirby in some way – he rides on Rick's back, can be carried in the talons of Coo and, most amusingly, can sit in the mouth of Kine as they swim around – and the best thing about this is that when Kirby absorbs the power of an enemy it not only transforms him but also his pal, adding an ability specific to that helper. Such variety and depth makes *Dream Land 2* a great game and it just might be the best of the classic Kirby games.

Dream Land 2 is also notable as one of the best Super Game Boy-compatible cartridges. When played through the SNES's woefully underused Game Boy playing peripheral, it added custom borders themed around Kirby's animal chums, included new sound effects such as applause on the title screen and thunder during the end sequence, as well as custom colour palettes that created a stunning ending that used the maximum number of colours the Super Game Boy would allow.

The following year, however, Kirby made his debut on Super NES proper and in a game that saw Sakurai return to the director's chair (*Dream Land 2* was directed by fellow HAL employee Shinichi Shimomura). *Kirby Super Star* (or *Kirby's Fun Pak* as it was known in Europe)



» [DS] We've certainly seen better uses of the DS's touch screen than this.



» [DS] *Kirby Mass Attack* is one of the better Kirby games.

Variety and depth makes Dream Land 2 a great game, and it might just be the best of the Kirby games

was a typically inventive release from Sakurai. Advertised as eight games on one cartridge, its main feature was *Spring Breeze*, an extremely colourful remake of *Dream Land* that incorporated new gameplay features including the copy ability as well as the option to transform any of those abilities into a helper character that could, if one desired, be controlled by a second player. A few shorter platform games appear on the cart but, more interesting, is the presence of games like *The Great Cave Offensive*, a treasure-hunting adventure game packed with references to other Nintendo titles, or *Revenge Of Meta Knight*, in which Kirby must race against the clock to destroy his rival's spaceship, the Halberd. Packed with countless hours of gameplay across several original game modes, *Kirby Super Star* was naturally popular and, appearing on what was arguably the most owned console of its day, it sold millions and remains a favourite among fans.

The next game in the core series saw Shimomura return to make *Dream Land 3*, a Super NES sequel that arrived so late in the system's life that it went unreleased in Europe due to the arrival of the N64. Which is a shame because Europe certainly missed out on one of the most attractive SNES games if nothing else. In the post-*Donkey Kong Country* era, Nintendo platform games had to try much harder to stand out visually, which led to the crayon story book feel of Miyamoto's *Yoshi's Island*, while *Dream Land 3* instead used a special and oft-overlooked high-resolution screen mode to bleed colours between pixels, giving the games a pastel-like look that achieved a blurry, dreamlike quality befitting the title. For the gameplay, HAL added three new animal pals to the existing roster, as well as Gooey, a helper character Kirby can summon at the cost of two hit points who fights alongside Kirby, controlled either by AI or another player. In spite of the rich visuals, *Dream Land 3* was exactly what the title suggested, an iterative continuation of the series that lacked the true innovation of *Super Star*, and is

KIRBY'S CAMEOS

Being a popular Nintendo mascot, Kirby has made cameo appearances in a number of other games, not least the Super Smash Bros series, which was made by Kirby creator Masahiro Sakurai. Here are some of his others:

- In *The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening*, Link is attacked by an enemy called the Anti-Kirby that can suck him up and spit him out.
- In *Mario & Luigi Superstar Saga* there's a cinema with posters on the wall. One features Kirby in a film called *Kirby Story*.
- In the opening to HAL's SNES RPG two Kirbys can be seen in a crowd of warriors.
- In *Pokemon Stadium 2* you can view a 3D representation of your character's room. If they own a NES then the TV displays a scene from *Kirby's Adventure*, and if they own a SNES then you'll see a scene from *Kirby Super Star*.
- Kirby is on billboards in the *Super FX* racer *Stunt Race FX*.
- Several Kirby characters appear as the solutions to puzzles in Super Famicom's *Picross Volume 3*.
- In the menu to 3DS augmented reality game *Face Raiders*, three enemies can be seen doing the famous Kirby Dance performed throughout the series. Which looks a little like this: <('.'<)(^'.'<) (^'.'^) <('.')> (^'.'^) (>'.'^)(>'.')>



» [NES] *Kirby's Adventure* added mini-game distractions, which are a central part of the series.



» [GBA] The Game Boy Advance *Kirby* games are decent enough but do lack a certain amount of originality.



» [GBA] The GBA *Kirby* games were great for the handheld's younger audience, but that was about it.



KIRBY'S CANCELLED GAMES

It's not easy to make a Kirby game, or so it seems. There have been quite a few that were announced but never made it to the shelves…



Kirby's Air Ride 64

Originally announced as *Kirby Bowl 64*, this would have been a sort of sequel to *Dream Course* and involved rolling a spherical Kirby around a 3D environment. It later expanded to include airboard gliding sections and was renamed *Kirby's Air Ride*. Though it features some similarities to the *Kirby Air Ride* eventually released on GameCube it's actually a significantly different game.



Kirby Tilt 'n' Tumble 2

A 3D sequel to the Game Boy Color game, this would have been a GameCube game controlled by a special GBA cart, connected to a GBA and plugged into the GameCube. With so much specialist hardware required, it's easy to see why the project would have been abandoned. It would work pretty well on the Wii U GamePad, however, so maybe the idea will be revived one day.



Kid Kirby

In development at DMA Design, the studio behind *Lemmings* and *Unirally*, *Kid Kirby* was to star an infant version of Kirby in a platform-puzzle game to be controlled using the SNES mouse. But when the mouse proved unpopular, DMA tested standard joypad controls, found them unsuitable and ceased production of the game. All that remains are a few debug screens available on programmer Mike Dailly's Flickr page.



Kirby GCN1

GameCube Kirby went through three different incarnations before it was eventually scrapped and revived as *Kirby's Return To Dream Land* on Wii. The first unreleased *GCN* game was a platform game that featured three helper characters who could team up with Kirby by all stacking on top of him like a playable totem pole. Like *Return To Dream Land*, it would allow four people to play at once.



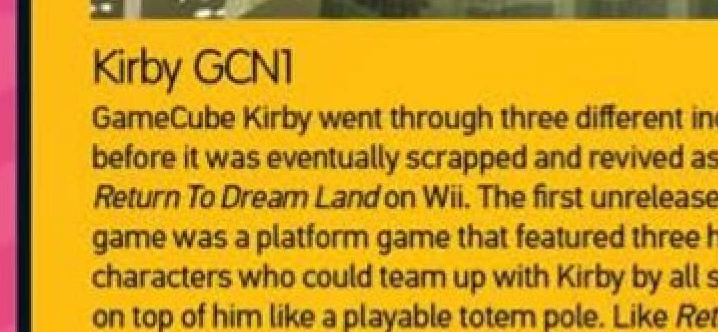
Kirby GCN2

The second iteration of the GameCube game would have featured a full 3D levels, viewed from a sort of isometric perspective and, in a bold change for the series, especially challenging gameplay. While this probably would have been one for the fans, we'll never know. Nintendo has only released one screen shot of the game, saying that it never reached the quality required for release.



Kirby GCN3

The third and final GameCube *Kirby* game would have been a traditional 2D platform game, complete with copy abilities, except it would have featured extremely high-resolution 2D visuals, good enough to match the anime that was airing at the time, *Kirby, Right Back At Ya!*, known as *Kirby Of The Stars* in Japan. Again, only one screen was ever released and nothing else is known.



» [SNES] *Kirby's Dream Course* is a perfect example of the cool *Kirby* spin-offs that exist.



» [DS] DS was instrumental in bringing new ideas to *Kirby*, as *Mass Attack* demonstrated.

Epic Yarn was Kirby on a full-on charm offensive. One of the easiest games of its type, but stunning

one of the reasons the Kirby series has a negative reputation for repetition and over-familiarity – the other being an especially high number of remakes.

Following *Dream Land 3*, the *Kirby* series fell into a bit of a slump. While some of the spin-off games were genuinely excellent, the main series became plagued by cancellations and mediocre releases. Next up was *Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards*, a particularly disappointing sequel in the context of its time. While *Mario* and *Zelda* transitioned into the 3D era with world-class productions that defined the way games would be designed for the next decade on, *Kirby* stuck to the same old tired template. The short length and easy gameplay, meanwhile, sat uneasily with fans who were expected to pay premium prices for costly N64 cartridges. Out of context, *Kirby 64* is a fun, colourful and playable *Kirby* adventure, but this was the point at which the series should and could have been reborn into something new and exciting. It didn't happen, and we're arguably still waiting for that evolution 12 years later.

Kirby's nadir continued in 2002 with the release of *Nightmare In Dreamland*,



a Game Boy Advance remake of *Kirby's Adventure* that added new mini-games and a multiplayer mode. Another short and easy game, as well as a retread, it did little to endear Kirby to the hardcore, although it did sell well with the GBA's massive audience of children. The next game on GBA was significantly better, however.

A co-development between HAL, Dimps and *Zelda: Oracles Of Ages/Seasons* developer Flagship, *Kirby & The Amazing Mirror* was an ambitious *Kirby* game that wrapped the familiar gameplay in a *Metroidvania* structure and threw in three AI Kirbys that could be summoned to help by using a magical mobile phone – as long as it had enough battery power left. An extremely long and deep *Kirby* game, *Amazing Mirror* suffered from a confusing map system and core gameplay that didn't quite evolve the series enough but it was certainly a step in the right direction after the previous few games. If you're an early adopter of 3DS, it's also sitting on your system right now, as it was one of twenty games in Nintendo's Ambassador Program, following the unexpected price drop in 2011.

In 2005, Kirby finally got the burst of inspiration he deserved. Inspired by the touch screen controls of the Nintendo DS, *Kirby: Power Paintbrush* was an entirely touch-controlled platform game in which Kirby appeared as a completely circular character and was manipulated indirectly, by drawing a limited rainbow path for him to follow on-screen. It was an early DS breakthrough that demonstrated how new technology could be used to bring innovation to classic franchises and sold the DS to gamers in ways that *Brain Training* and *Nintendogs* could only dream of.

So did Kirby enter a new age of constant re-invention? Sadly not. The next game, also co-produced with Flagship, was *Kirby: Mouse Attack*, a traditional Kirby game in the vein of *Amazing Mirror* that added only iterative features such as the ability to level up or combine copy abilities. It was a decent platformer but a disappointing one after the runaway inventiveness of *Power Paintbrush*. *Kirby Super Star Ultra* followed in 2008. A remake of the SNES game, it featured enhanced visuals and threw in several new mini-games, but the series had become a little ho-hum again by this point and *Super Star Ultra* went mostly ignored.



» [Wii] This tree boss appeared in the first stage of *Kirby's Dream Land* and has been a staple part of the *Kirby* series ever since.



» [DS] Even the lovable Kirby has a violent streak to him.





» [SNES] Kirby has leant himself to several genres over time.



» [Wii] *Kirby's Epic Yarn* remains one of the best looking and most original *Kirby* games.

As is now typical of Kirby, it wasn't long before he got out of his funk again, and in 2010 he bounced back with one of the best games in the series. Developed by the ex-Konami veterans at Good-Feel, *Kirby's Epic Yarn* reinvented our hero and his world as a game made entirely from wool and other fabrics. Not just an original art style, it allowed the aesthetic to inspire the gameplay and had you pulling back curtains in the levels, unravelling threads, popping buttons or even dipping beneath the fabric of a level's background to reveal secrets. *Epic Yarn* was Kirby on a full-on charm offensive. It was still one of the easiest games of its type but the stunning presentation and inviting world begged you to play and kept you interested in ways the previous games sometimes struggled to.

And if by now you thought the tradition was to follow up an innovative *Kirby* title with a dull one then Nintendo had a surprise in store. 2011's *Kirby Mass Attack* may have been the fourth *Kirby* title to appear on DS but it was far from tired. Incorporating elements of the RTS genre, it returned to stylus-based touch screen controls and had you manipulating up to ten Kirbys at once in a puzzle-platformer hybrid that, perhaps for the first time in the series history, really got the balance right between fun and challenge.

Also that year was the last *Kirby* game so far. Titled *Return To Dream Land* in the US and *Kirby's Adventure Wii* in the UK, this was the first traditional *Kirby* game to appear on a home console since *Kirby 64* but was much less disappointing. A traditional side-scroller, it adds drop-in/drop-out four-player co-op, in which players can all be Kirby or pick from one of his co-stars King Dedede, Meta Knight or Waddle Dee. Each of these has their own special abilities while Kirby plays as normal, even able to suck up other players and spit them out as projectiles. Rightly overlooked next to the superior *Epic Yarn*, *Return To Dream Land* is a nevertheless entertaining game that sits proudly alongside Wii's other co-op platformers *New Super Mario Bros Wii* and *Donkey Kong Country Returns*.



Where will Kirby go from here? For now there's *Dream Collection*, an anniversary anthology for Wii that bundles *Dream Lands 1-3, Adventure, Super Star* and *Kirby 64* onto one disc alongside some new stages based on *Return To Dream Land*. So far the collection is unconfirmed for Europe, although all of the games are available separately for Wii and 3DS Virtual Console.

Beyond that, there hasn't been a *Kirby* game announced for either 3DS or Wii U, and we have to imagine that the unusual features of both those consoles will inspire some truly imaginative new games. And we wouldn't mind seeing Masahiro Sakurai return to the series either. After reinventing *Kid Icarus* on 3DS we're sure he could do something amazing with Kirby – perhaps that full 3D game he's never had – but as Sakurai currently has his hands full with a new *Smash Bros* for 3DS and Wii U, that's unlikely to be soon. Whatever he does next, though, we just hope it's one of his more surprising games…

THE MAKING OF…



Before wowing the world with PGA Tour Golf, Lee Actor crafted an entirely different sports-game experience on ice! Craig Grannell wobbles on to the rink and shoots a puck in his general direction



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** BALLY SENTE
- » **DEVELOPER:** LEE ACTOR
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS

With some videogames, you get the sense they were inevitable. Creator Lee Actor tells us that he was "forever inventing sports games and simulations" when he was a kid. One day in the early Sixties, his father brought home a tabletop ice hockey game, featuring a single, fixed, spinning player on each side. Each player was controlled by a wired device with two buttons: one to spin clockwise and one anti-clockwise. "It was extremely simple but very entertaining, and so when I got the chance to design my own game for Bally Sente, I remembered how fun that old hockey game was."

Lee remembers that he always had a bias in favour of simplicity, which suited coin-op gaming, where the impetus was on immediacy. This, along with childhood memories, drove much of the initial design work for *Hat Trick*: "I always thought it was key two people could play against one another, which makes for an automatically balanced game. Ed Rotberg and I played an awful lot of Activision's *Ice Hockey* on the Atari 2600, and so I'm sure that was an influence as well!"

As with Activision's title, *Hat Trick* arrived during the era of forced abstraction in gaming, and so effort was concentrated on the feel of the product rather than aesthetics. The controls had to be intuitive and straightforward, and Lee reasoned that when controlling a player moving on a low-friction surface, a four-way joystick or a trackball would have done the job. "I thought a trackball was overkill, and I then decided on a single button for shooting the puck, ensuring a very easy learning curve." To emphasise the playing surface, the guys on the ice had to deal with inertia, a contrast to many of the more direct response systems of the time: "The inertia of the players is really what makes *Hat Trick* feel right and makes it fun. Getting that working required equal amounts of art and science," says Lee, who dismisses our positing simultaneously controlling



» [Arcade] Team **RG** scores its first goal after starting to play properly, rather than making patterns in the ice.



» [Arcade] Approaching at an angle can often fox a computer-controlled goalie, or a distracted human-controlled one.





» [Arcade] It's overtime and Team **RG** secures the winning goal! 6:5! Eat that, 1984 videogame AI!



» [Arcade] As Team **RG** wins plaudits from its audience (a bemused schnauzer), the ice is polished, ready for a new game.



» [Arcade] Oh dear. Three-nil down already. That's what happens when you forget the screen-grab combo.



the goalie was an added complication. "That could have been a 'pat the head, rub the tummy' situation had I used a second controller for the goalie. But most of the time, your attention is on the main player and you don't care what the goalie is doing. Occasionally, your attention shifts completely to the goalie. To me, it all seems very intuitive!"

Although intended as a two-player game, *Hat Trick* nonetheless boasted an AI opponent, designed to respond dynamically to the skills of the player. "My approach to designing AI was always two-fold. First, isolate characteristics I could put a 'knob' on, to smoothly dial up or down. Secondly, find a measurable driving force in the game that could be used to dynamically turn those knobs incrementally, based on the game situation." In *Hat Trick*, Lee explains this method was used for speed of reaction and accuracy of moving to a predetermined optimum spot. "The driving input for the AI is the score differential. The farther ahead the human player gets, the tougher the computer player gets, and vice versa."

The result was a game that was eventually relatively easy to beat, but that initially (and importantly in the arcades) provided a stern challenge. Even if you lost, *Hat Trick* offered what was, at the time, a little slice of arcade magic, in an ice resurfacer cleaning up the trails left by the skaters. "I believe those trails started out as a programming mistake," admits Lee. "I was moving something around the bitmap of the playing field and inadvertently replaced an ice pixel with a pixel of slightly different colour. It immediately struck me that it would be cool to have the players leave skating marks on the ice, like in real hockey, and then have the resurfacer come out at the end to clean it up, also like in real hockey. It was one of those happy accidents that can be useful if you're alert to it."

I was moving something around the playing field and inadvertently replaced an ice pixel with one of a slightly different colour

LEE ACTOR ON HOW THE ICE RESURFACING CAME ABOUT

While there was a measure of luck to the aesthetics, the same can't be said for the gameplay, and the upshot of this combination of factors was *Hat Trick* being ranked number one in *Replay* magazine for five straight months. Lee remembers that it was "probably the best-earning game over the longest period of time to come out of Bally Sente", and he remains happy with it. "Today, I can imagine cosmetic improvements and added complexity, but the bottom line is the game was a lot of fun." His only regret is that a four-player version of the game was never released. "Because the original *Hat Trick* had done very well, I was given the go-ahead to design a four-player version, with two players and a goalie on each side. The game was built with the monitor horizontally mounted in a table-like cabinet configuration. The optimum was two humans on each side."

Lee said the revised set-up provided "tremendous additional strategic possibilities", including passing, blocking, and 'picking' an opposing player. "I'd say it was the most fun game I ever did. For months, four of us played the game for an hour a day at work, and I'm sure the rest of the office appreciated the extremely loud disruption it always caused!"

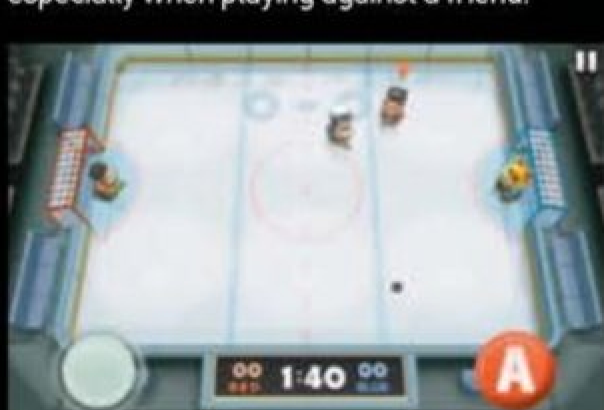
Despite testing through the roof in Canada, to the point a coin box got so full it jammed, the game never went into production. "I asked Ed Rotberg, who I worked with at the time, and he said it didn't earn enough to justify the expense of a custom cabinet. Sente's business model depended on selling cheap cabinets and cheaper game cartridges, and this would have been a one-off with no promise of future cartridges. Too bad – it was a really fun game!"



A COOL REMAKE

ACCORDING TO MOUNTAIN Sheep's Petri Kero, iOS *Hat Trick* tribute *Ice Rage* "started out as a dare". Co-founder Jouni Mannonen proposed to do a quick version over a weekend, and as a fan, Petri was intrigued. After a week, there was a playable demo. Lead artist Timo Vihola then worked up 3D visuals. Two weeks later, the game was submitted to Apple.

That fortnight, though, demanded decisions regarding what to include and leave out from the original. "At first, we set out to replicate *Hat Trick*, but in the process, we came up with cool new ideas," explains Petri. "Checking your opponent was the major core gameplay feature we changed from the original, and it was a fun addition, especially when playing against a friend!"





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SNAKE PIT
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1984

PGA TOUR GOLF
SYSTEMS: PC/MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1990/1991

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG: SPINBALL
SYSTEMS: SEGA MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1993



In the chair with...

EUGENE EVANS

A ginger-haired, bespectacled teenager might not seem lika an obvious hero but Eugene Evans' journey from bedroom coder to sports car-driving media star was an inspiration to many teenage programmers. Paul Drury steps into Eugene's lair

HAVING GOTTEN HIS foot in the door of the nascent videogame industry through working at Liverpool's Microdigital, one of Britain's first computer shops, Eugene had his first game published through Bug-Byte Software in 1982 at the tender age of sixteen. He joined Imagine Software as their first employee and was there throughout the company's rollercoaster ride from glamorous media darlings to bankruptcy and incriminations. His work on the much-hyped but never released C64 Megagame Psyclapse led him to the newly-formed Psygnosis, but he left the UK behind in the mid-Eighties to carve out a successful career in the US games industry. He recently left his post as general manager of BioWare Mythic, part of the EA empire, to set up a new venture and despite three decades in the games business, still grins like that teenager in those iconic Megagame adverts…



At Retro Gamer, we like to get straight to the really big questions. Did Imagine Software really buy you a Lotus Esprit before you were even old enough to drive, like it said in the tabloids of the day?
Yes, they did, but I was old enough to drive. And I crashed it. Give an 18-year-old a fast car and what's going to happen? I was leaving a party at Bruce Everiss's house [marketing and PR guru at Imagine Software], which we were having while he was away on his honeymoon. I don't think Bruce knows that bit! I was completely sober, we were in a hurry to get some Chinese food and I crashed into a rather large rock in front of the Moby Dick pub on Caldy Road in the Wirral. Imagine went bust before the incident went to court, so I turned up and said, "I'm unemployed… and I've crashed a Lotus". It didn't get a lot of sympathy.

So when did you first discover the glamorous world of videogames?
During a trip to the US in 1977 to visit relatives. I went into a Radio Shack store, Tandy in the UK, and they had a TRS-80 computer and I went, "Wow!" I'd always been into electronics, so when I came back to Liverpool, I started to hang out in the Tandy store. Then I discovered another computer shop in about 1979 – Microdigital. It was owned by Bruce Everiss and the remarkable thing about that place was that it opened on a Saturday! Very few outlets selling computers did and even less would let some snotty kid hang out and use the computers.

Didn't you end up working at the shop while still at school?
When I turned fourteen, I asked if they'd give me a job and I became the gopher. 'Go and get burgers, go to our other office and fetch a package…', etc. I worked on Saturdays and during the summers I'd work every day for a few months. Tie on in the week, T-shirt and jeans at the weekend.

How did you go from working in a computer shop to starting your career in coding?
Bruce had been to the States and discovered there was a vibrant computer book industry over there, so he started importing books and pioneering magazines like *Byte*. It was a big part of his business. Sometimes he'd pay me in computer books, saying, 'You should read this!' That was my real education [laughs]. I owe him a lot.

You ended up joining Bug-Byte Software not long after. How did that come about?
Bug-Byte was set up by the two Tonys – Baden and Milner – these two geeky Oxford Chemistry graduates. They were doing ZX81 and Vic-20 games and Dave Lawson [future founder of Imagine] had written a really good *Pac-Man* copy called *Vic-Men* for them. He was looking to improve their development system and wanted to use an Apple II to code on. I had an Apple myself and had written an article



"Imagine was in the entertainment business so inevitably there's hype. The danger is when you start believing it"

SELECTED TIMELINE

Vic Panic 1982
Wacky Waiters 1983
Catcha Snatcha 1983
Arcadia 64 1983
Psyclapse Unreleased
Brattacus 1986
Bermuda Project 1987



IN SEARCH OF PSYCLAPSE

For readers of a certain age, mentioning *Bandersnatch* and *Psyclapse* should bring back poignant memories of enigmatic magazine adverts and outrageous promises of how these two 'Megagames' were going to redefine the gaming experience on the Spectrum and Commodore 64 respectively. Schoolkids salivated, the hype escalated… and then Imagine imploded and the games were buried in the rubble of bankruptcy. The interest in these lost titles has endured, though. Were they really going to be the best games ever and were they worth destroying a company for?

We know something of *Bandersnatch*. A 'work in progress' demo can be seen in the *Commercial Breaks* documentary from 1984, which famously captured Imagine's financial meltdown on camera. John Gibson and Ally Noble, programmer and artist respectively on the game, have spoken in these pages about what was planned, what was created and how much of *Bandersnatch*'s code ended up in Ocean's *Gift From The Gods*.

» The tantalising Megagame adverts first appeared in the February 1984 issues of *C&VG*, *Personal Computer Games* and *Your Computer*.



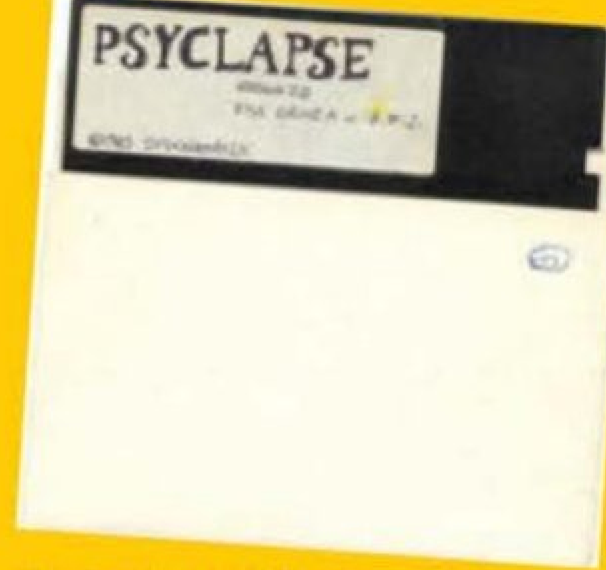
Yet of Psyclapse, we know almost nothing. Until now. "We came up with the name first and tried to think of a plot to go with the name," explains Eugene. "The basic storyline was that there was a planet or place and someone was pulling great warriors from around the universe to this place where they had to fight and survive. We talked about *Psyclapse* as a 'psychological collapse' believe it or not. That was the premise!"

This is fascinating stuff but did the intriguing concept get beyond the ideas stage? "Oh there was stuff on screen," Eugene confirms. "It was like *Bandersnatch* in that there was exploration and some combat. Essentially it was about these warriors trying to work out why they'd been brought there and how they could get back. What both Megagames had in common were characters two or three inches tall on the screen. A lot of games at the time had tiny characters.

"We were trying to consume all that memory we planned to have access to by having really great quality animation. We not only hired artists and designers, we hired animators. We even hired writers! We were going to get them to write a novel that would go in the box. There was a whole lot of craziness around what the Megagames were going to cost. It kept going up. One of the great scenes in *Commercial Breaks* is when our poor sales rep has to tell a buyer it's going to cost £40, eight times more than a normal game…"

Eugene is quick to give credit to John and Ian Weatherburn, who were "much further on with *Bandersnatch*. They had big characters walking around on screen. *Psyclapse* was very challenging. I don't think we really understood the scope of what we were trying to do. We didn't sit down and lay out a plan. Much more than that is either lost deep down in my mind or never figured out."

Yet this might not be quite the end of the story. Back in April 2004, Stuart Fotheringham, a key figure in the Liverpool development scene in the Eighties, held a charity auction of eighteen 5.25" development disks from his programming days. "Some contained data relating to the long lost *MegaTree* game, some were corrupt and one was enticingly labelled *Psyclapse*," explains our own Richard Burton, who wrote about the amazing find in issue 5 of **Retro Gamer** and was given the disks by former **RG** editor Martyn Carroll in payment for freelance work.



» The *Psyclapse* Sage IV development disk, image courtesy of www.gtw64.co.uk See the site for an interview with Marc Wilding, and more info.

"The *Psyclapse* disk remained a strange unyielding curio until I learned that Imagine used Sage IV computers for development of the Megagames. A Sage enthusiast in America recently offered to take a look at the disk and, assuming it's not corrupt or devoid of any data, will relay the results back as and when."

While we keep our collective fingers crossed, we have uncovered one tantalising fragment of that lost project. Frank Gasking, of the excellent www.gtw64.co.uk, diligently looked through the contents of Stuart's development disks, which had been included on **RG** issue 5's cover-mounted disk, and discovered a rather large sprite of a vaguely medieval-looking figure. Could this be from *Psyclapse*?

"Yes, I think it's a very early version of the hero," confirmed Eugene on seeing Frank's find. "I can't believe you guys and your software archaeology!"

If we dig up anything else, you'll be the first to know, dear readers…

for the *Liverpool Software Gazette* [a computer magazine with a technical bent, published by Microdigital between 1979 and 1981] about this card that let you write Z80 and 6502 code on the Apple.

Dave came to the store to check it out. They bought a few Apple machines and I ended up delivering them to Bug-Byte. I'd been doing some graphics on the Apple, they saw them and said, "Here's a Vic-20, why don't you do a game?" There was a game in the arcade in Liverpool called *Space Panic* that I'd put far too much money into so I wrote *Vic Panic*, which I finished just as I was leaving school. They said, "Come and work for us!"



» [C64] Eugene handled the conversion of *Arcadia* to the C64 with mixed results.

So in 1982, you went straight from school to join one of the earliest software publishers in the UK. That must have been exciting.

It was an interesting summer! *Vic Panic* came out, and Dave and Mark Butler, a sales guy at Bug-Byte who'd also worked at Microdigital, said, "We're doing all the heavy lifting here!" Dave had just done a great version of *Space Invaders* called *Spectral Invaders* and so they planned to leave. Dave also wrote *Arcadia* over that summer for the Spectrum and Vic-20 and they set up Imagine Software with a grant of about £25,000, I think, from a Government scheme.

You left Bug-Byte to join them in their new venture, then?

Not straight away. When they left, I took over reviewing the games people sent in. I remember Jez San, who later set up Argonaut, sent in a BBC assembler debugger – we didn't publish it but that's how I first met Jez. Don Priestly submitted the sequel to *Mazogs* but the Tonys never appreciated how much money we'd made from the first one and totally wanted to low-ball Don. I refused to go back to Don with the offer they'd made – it was ridiculous.

You joined Imagine in 1983 and your first game for the company was *Wacky Waiters*, which we talked about last month. You must have been very proud to see it on the shelves and selling well.

Absolutely. You walk into WHSmiths and there's a product there with your name on it. I think anyone who's gone into this business, that's when it seals it for them. It also makes you realise you might be able to make a living out of this…

Yes, we hear the money was rolling in. Was it all fast cars and loose women?

I can't speak for the loose women [laughs]. We were definitely having a good time. It was a great business to be in, the growth was there, the sales were there and at the same time we were trying to create a perception that was bigger than we were. There's no doubt about that. One of the things Bruce brought to the company was that you had to do things with a real quality.

If you look at the games released a few years earlier, how they were packaged and what they looked like… people weren't investing in the overall quality of production. It didn't take much to say "Instead of paying someone a few hundred bucks for

an illustration, let's pay a few thousand and get a good quality one." By doing that, Imagine very quickly differentiated the quality, or at least the perception of quality, of their products.

That's interesting you say 'perception of quality'. Was it all about appearances?
Let me give you an example of something we did, that I always thought really got the company started. We'd just shipped *Arcadia* on the Vic and we found out there was a bug that made it crash. It was all mail order at the time so we knew the three or four thousand people who'd bought that first version before we fixed the bug… and we mailed them all a replacement copy. We all sat on the floor in the office, put them in jiffy bags and mailed all of them out by hand.

Respect due, Eugene. In 1983, you wrote your last game for the Vic-20, *Catcha Snatcha*, which was considerably more ambitious than your previous work on the unexpanded Vic.
I think we were starting to show we were getting more adventurous than the machine could handle. I have huge respect for people like Jeff Minter for what he was doing on the Vic. He was a far better designer and coder on that platform than I ever was. There were people doing great things but we were surely coming to the end of what could be done on the platform effectively.

Has the Vic got a special place in your heart?

Oh yeah. Anyone who coded for the Vic loved and loathed the same thing: loathed the limited amount of memory the damn thing had but then loved the challenge of trying to get the most out of it. It was short-lived in the UK because along came the 64. It was one of the first examples of us [Imagine] only servicing the UK market. If we'd been able to figure out how to get into the US with our games, then I think we'd be dealing with a different history going forward.

You moved up to the C64 with a conversion of *Arcadia*. How did you find the experience?
Even though the 64 had such great, dedicated hardware for things like sprites and audio, it was a challenge to get my head around. The machine had eight sprites and we needed eight things attacking a spaceship. That meant that with the bullets, you needed more sprites than the machine had. I went down the path of using some clever trick to alternate when the sprites were on screen, changing them every other frame… that doubles your sprites but it flickers like crazy! It was a mistake and not a great port.

> "Sometimes I was paid in computer books. That was my real education!"



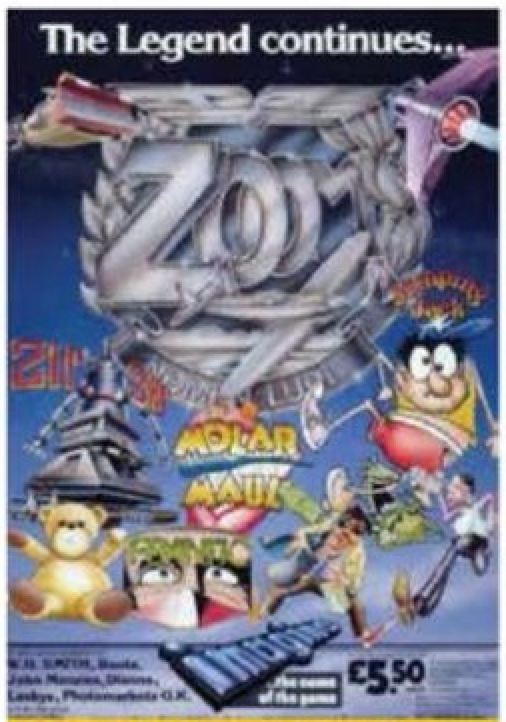
» Eugene signs autographs for his adoring fans.



» [Amiga] The DNA of lost Megagame *Bandersnatch* ended up in *Brattacus*, published by Psygnosis.

Yes, that flickering could be distracting… and things at Imagine Software were becoming pretty distracting, too. Stories about piles of cash, flash cars and wanton excess at the company appeared in the press, and you became the poster boy for that whole media circus.
Yeah, I got caught up in the publicity thing. One of the things we thought about was how we were going to get the company on the map. What's a story that can go big, go national, get some attention? I think it was Bruce Everiss's cousin, who ran a PR company, who came up with the idea. Times are rough, there's high unemployment in England as a whole but Liverpool in particular, and we have a young man here who is successful in a market that is new, interesting and exciting and people will go, "Wow, he's making money writing games!"

And were you making £35,000 a year as quoted in the press?
We wrote the press release and came up with a number that I potentially could've made. It wasn't what I actually made. It was pure spin. We put it out and I don't think any of us expected it to be as big as it was. The following day, I came in and the phone was ringing off the hook. The national press and several local TV stations all wanted to interview me. It was astonishing. The proverbial videogame 'whizkid' stereotype entered into existence, which to this day makes me cringe!



» Eugene's Vic-20 games frequently featured in Imagine's glossy magazine ads.

Did it make you cringe at the time or did you rather enjoy all the attention?
I probably enjoyed it a bit too much. We were in the entertainment business so inevitably there's hype. The danger is when you get caught up in it and start believing it.

And do you think Imagine started believing in its own hype?
We let the hype get ahead of us and it became a distraction to a lot of people there, including me.

Your face didn't just appear in the tabloids, either. Level 5 of Matthew Smith's *Manic Miner* is entitled 'Eugene's Lair' and that's clearly a pixelated caricature of yourself, floating between those snappy toilets. Did you have any idea that was coming?
Nope. This is how I remember it… every year we went to the Personal Computer World show and we heard rumblings of a new game the guys over at Bug-Byte were showing. I'd not long left Bug-Byte at that point. They asked me to play it and when I

got to level 5, there it was, Eugene's Lair! A big head with glasses going up and down, clearly not meant to be complimentary. It was a dig but I took it in jest. It was a good way for them to capture some of that buzz around me and Imagine at the time.

One of the most famous examples of that 'buzz' around Imagine was over *Bandersnatch* and *Psyclapse*. Imagine was churning out industrial levels of hype about these 'Megagames' redefining the gaming experience and rumours abounded about additional hardware and a £40 price tag. What prompted this hugely ambitious gamble?
By then [1984], lots of publishers had appeared, lots of bedroom programmers were cranking out games and lots of piracy was going on. Plus we felt we were reaching the limits of those home computers. I think it was Dave Lawson that said, "What if we add some hardware which lets you do more and is also impossible to copy?" We employed a really smart engineer called Steve Lavache, who I'm still in touch with, and he designed a prototype add-on that wasn't just more memory, it was a ROM which you could put a game on.



» [Vic-20] Eugene's first published game was *Vic Panic*, a plucky clone of arcade hit *Space Panic*.

And then someone pointed at you and said, "Eugene, make us a Megagame!"
Well, there was a whole bunch of us. The year before, we'd started making the transition from one guy doing pretty much everything, including desperately trying to draw the graphics, to us actually hiring artists. Previously, we hadn't bothered employing musicians because what was the point if you didn't have the memory to include serious music in the game? Now we did have memory! We were breaking the whole development model back then and hiring a load of people. Suddenly, these games had multiple artists, musicians, people doing sound effects, a couple of coders – it was a big switch! It foresaw what was coming. The future wasn't going to be about one person producing a game, it was going to be about teams. The downside, and what really bit us, is that we didn't understand that this meant planning and coordination.

We know it all ended very badly. Personally, what do you think went wrong at Imagine?
It's amazing to think that at the time, we were the number one publisher in the UK – Bruce has been quoted saying we were turning over a million a month which was a lot of money at the time – but we had failed to tap into the US market. We were getting distracted by all these machines coming out over here, like the Oric, the Amstrad, the Dragon.



All these machines were produced in the UK and had no market in the US. If we could've gone after the huge US market, that whole period could've played out differently for a whole bunch of companies.

Didn't Imagine have a deal with Marshall Cavendish that could have brought in a lot of money and saved you?
In parallel to the Megagames, we'd done this deal with Marshall Cavendish. They were going to produce a magazine about videogaming, which would have a cassette on the cover with a free game. We hired a ton of people and said we'd produce ten games in a year, which was just crazy. It's not a reflection on those people – a lot of them went on to do great games – but in just two years we'd made this transition to one guy doing everything, to small teams, to a hundred people trying to produce ten games in a year that were actually good. When Marshall Cavendish saw the quality of the first games they said, "We're not doing this, we're pulling out." Suddenly we're left with far more staff than we need. To their credit, the management really didn't want to cut people. They saw it as a family but finally it caught up with us. We knew we were heading for bad times.

And things did get really bad. Were you there when the bailiffs arrived to declare Imagine bankrupt?
Yes, I was there that day. The office was in a shambles. There was a lot of division, a lot of fear, a lot of concern. Everyone was in the pub – things were generally lax as we were all afraid of where things were heading. The next thing I know, someone whispers in my ear, "You better get upstairs, the bailiffs are here." We ran back to the office to find the bailiffs and local sheriff locking the doors and taking an inventory. John Gibson [programmer of *Bandersnatch*] and I saw what was going on, so we grabbed as many of the development machines as we could, took them to the bathrooms, put them on the toilets and locked the doors. We didn't see it as stealing. We had the

> "You walk into WHSmiths and there's a game there with your name on it. I think anyone who's gone into this business, that's when it seals it for them"


» [Vic-20] Lost children and parcel bombs – the life of *Catcha Snatcha*'s store detective was never dull.

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

3: The number of games that Eugene coded for the Vic-20

10: Pence Imagine Software was charging for a balloon with their logo on it

1008: Cups of coffee consumed by the Megagame team according to a magazine advert at the time

1980: The year Bug-Byte software was founded. Eugene joined for a short period in 1982

£35,000: Eugene's supposed salary aged 16, as reported in The Daily Star. This number may have been exaggerated. (It was)

26: The number of games to be produced by Imagine for magazine publishers Marshall Cavendish across five systems

£11,000,000: The amount Imagine was reportedly due to receive over two years for the Marshall Cavendish deal

1: The number of games that actually got produced as part of the Marshall Cavendish deal (Pedro). The arrangement was, inevitably, swiftly cancelled



» [Amiga] Published by Mirrorsoft, *Bermuda Project* was Eugene's last game before moving to the USA.

best intentions – we wanted to finish those Megagames! We needed to grab that stuff and work out how to continue working on them.

Did you manage to save those development machines from the clutches of the courts then?
Yes, we did set up at Dave Lawson's house in the Wirral but then we went to a bankruptcy hearing and at the end, they rattled off a list of people they wanted to stay behind. Me, John [Gibson] and a number of other people stayed around and a nice lady walked up and said, 'Are you Eugene Richard Evans?' I now know if anyone ever does that, say NO! She handed me an envelope that said they believed I had assets of Imagine Software in my possession and if I didn't hand them over, they would take action. Needless to say, we complied.

Did you copy the code before you had to hand back the hardware?

I think the statutes of limitations mean I'm now safe to say of course we copied them! We did get the rights to Bandersnatch in the end and it became Brattacus. It didn't matter in the end, though, as none of that was used.

And did any of the *Psyclapse* code make it into *Brattacus*?
It was really just some of the game design ideas. Sinclair were about to come out with the QL and we realised we didn't need any extra hardware. Here's a machine that's going to have enough memory, it has this crazy custom tape drive we can put a big game on. The plan was to do it for the QL but that machine ended up being a failure, so Dave, who I think was the principle coder, moved it onto the ST and Amiga, where it became *Brattacus*.

***Brattacus* came out through Psygnosis in 1986. Were you directly part of this project?**
Dave and Ian [Hetherington, former director at Imagine] formed a company called Finchspeed – they went to Company House and bought one off the shelf with this crazy made-up name – which they later renamed Psygnosis. I was part of that but it's all a bit of a blur. That was when it became clear to me that my coding days were at an end.

What do you mean? You'd had some hit games, Eugene.
Oh no, there were far better programmers out there than me, far better game designers. My homegrown skills were being surpassed by the demands of these machines. More dedicated programmers were coming in who were more effective working in a team. It became increasingly apparent to me that I was struggling to keep up.

That's very candid of you, Eugene. Is this the reason you left Britain?
I left Psygnosis around the time that *Brattacus* shipped and started my own company, Graphic Final. We produced a game called *Bermuda Project* for Mirrorsoft and it caught the eye of the founder of US dev ICOM Simulations. He put money into my company but after a year or so of doing that, he said he couldn't do it any more, but why didn't I come over and join them? Frankly, I decided my reputation went before me wherever I went in the UK, so it would be healthy to get a fresh start.

What did you end up doing in the US? Did you stay in videogames?
I was ready to do anything! I did technical support, helping with a development tool, but not coding. I said to myself, I'm going to figure out another role, not as a coder. I had a great time with ICOM and started to find my place in a business role, working with Apple, getting into marketing and project management. We did the *Shadowgate* series and also one of the first CD-Rom games, *Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective*. In 1997 I set up Infinite Ventures, my own consulting company and handled the distribution and marketing for *Dark Age Of Camelot*, one of the early successful MMORPGs…

Two things before you go. Do you still drive a Lotus Esprit?
[laughs] Oh no, I got my sports car inclinations out of my system! I drive a nice sensible Audi A4 these days.

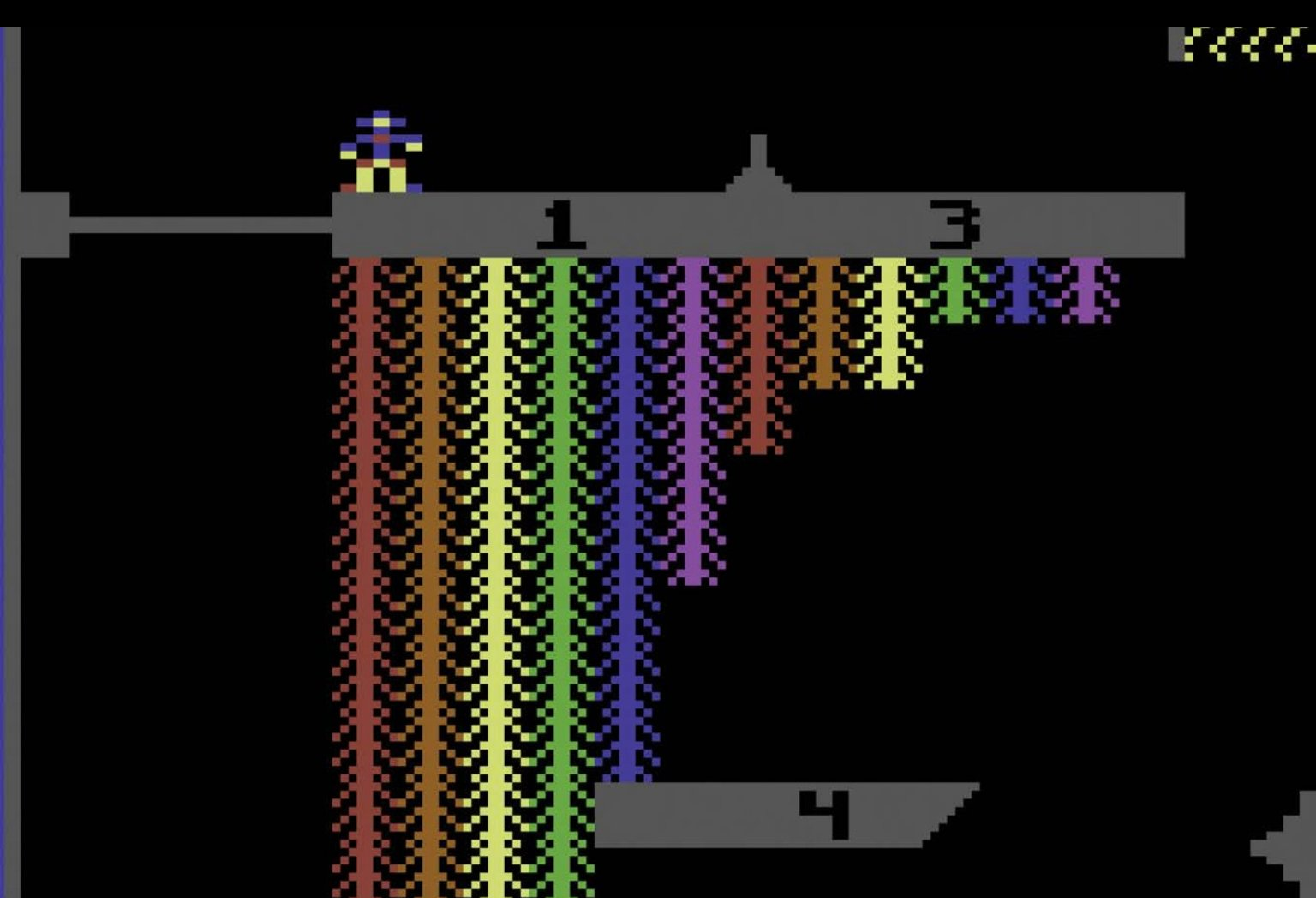
And did Imagine really send a private detective to investigate Ultimate Play The Game?
That is actually true! We hired a private investigator to go and check out Ultimate games. We wondered who the hell they were and where they'd come from so we sent him down to Ashby de la Zouch.

Did he find anything out?
He never came back… [cue sinister laugh]

Many thanks to Richard Burton and Frank Gasking



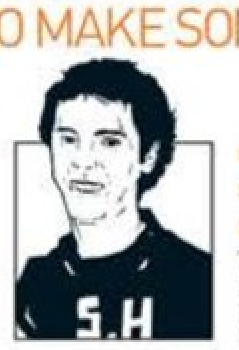
» [Amiga] The *Shadowgate* series provided some impressive point and click adventuring on the 16-bits.



Space Taxi

IT'S TIME TO MAKE SOME CRAZY MONEY, ARE YA READY? 3... 2... 1... LIFTOFF!

» RETROREVIVAL



» COMMODORE 64
» MUSE SOFTWARE
» 1984

Think *Crazy Taxi* meets *Lunar Lander* and then add a dash of *Manic Miner*, and you've got a pretty good picture of how John Kutcher's *Space Taxi* plays. It's a game of dexterity, simple and engaging tactics, and ferrying little shouting men from A to B.

As an intergalactic cabbie, it's your job to pick up customers who randomly appear around the level. Once they're safely inside your cab, you must then drop them off to their desired location. This will be either somewhere on the level – drop-off points, or 'pads', are helpfully numbered – or through the level exit that takes you to the next stage.

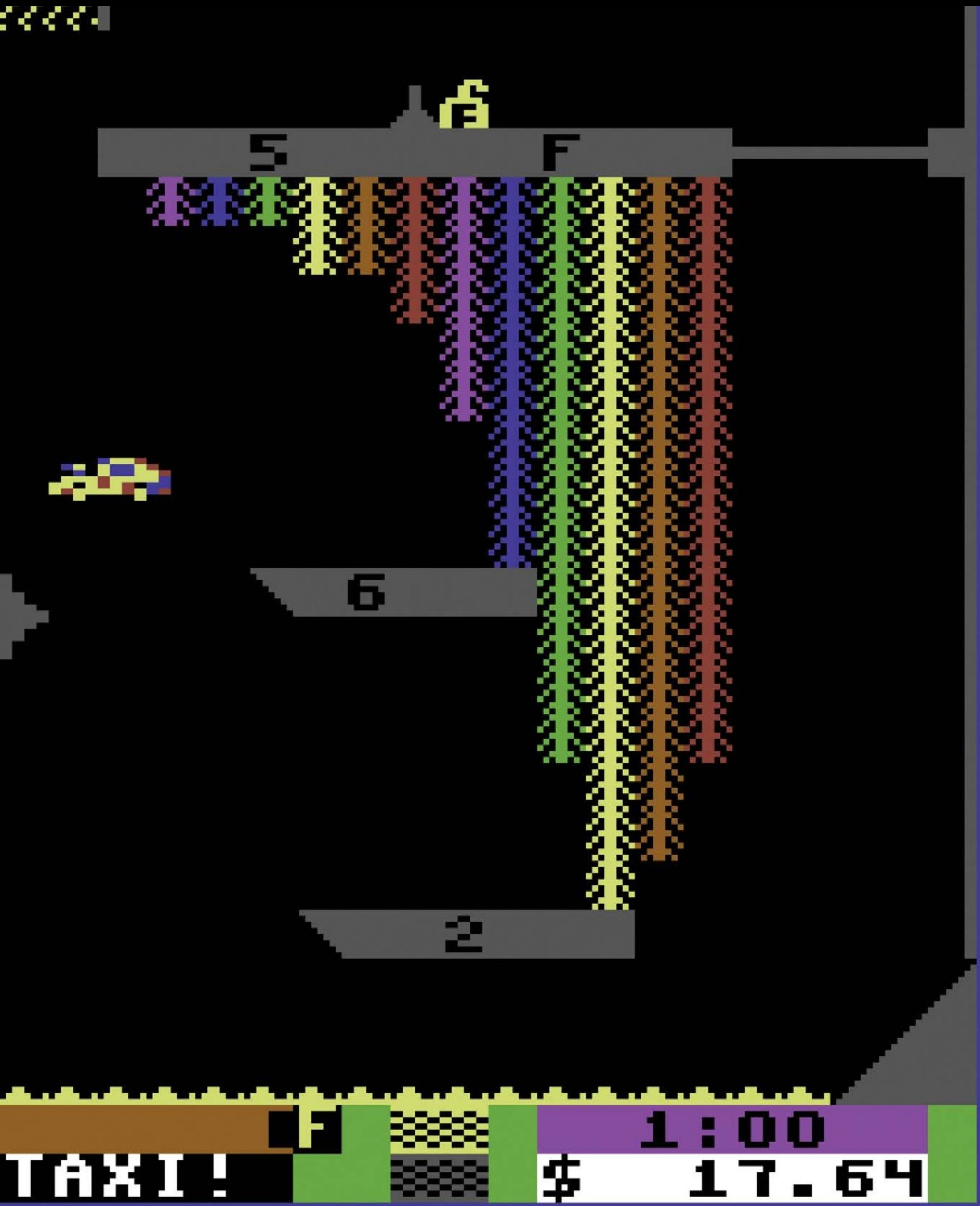
Comprised of 25 stages, each takes the form of a single-screen arena. As you progress, the designs and layouts become increasingly more devilish. Indeed, while the opening few stages are a breeze and do well to settle you into the object of the game, the later stages ramp up the challenge with moving parts, tight tunnels and various obstacles to avoid. As well as this, it's vital you keep a beady eye on your taxi's fuel level too, which depletes when you're moving but can be replenished through fuel canisters that are placed in hard-to-reach places.

The way in which the taxi steers is also something of note, as you must consider thrust and inertia when manoeuvring and landing. When doing the latter, you also have to activate landing feet – which impede horizontal control of the ship – and then touch down smoothly. Fail to do so and the taxi will explode, making your next and final stop the afterlife.

The beauty of *Space Taxi* comes from the combination of its simplicity, difficulty curve, controls and the little touches that make it a joy to play. The passengers give off digitized commands in a variety of different pitches, and aesthetically it radiates that Sensible Software-esque style of beauty, where the sprites are tiny but they look incredibly detailed.

Space Taxi is a challenging, addictive and unique game, and I was always sad that it never graced the CPC. Especially as I'm convinced the machine would have done a cracking port of it.




5
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1:00
TAXI!
$ 17.64

RETRORATED



>> It's been an awesome month for us. Sega wows us with a stunning remake of NiGHTS Into Dreams, WayForward tweaks our nostalgia glands with the enjoyable Double Dragon Neon, while Firaxis reboots X-Com in stunning fashion

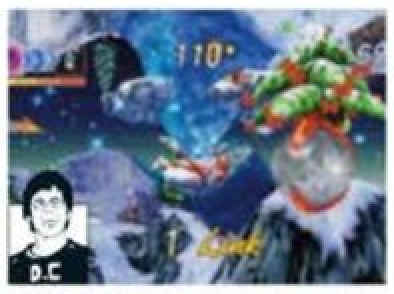
✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
NiGHTS Into Dreams
Sega impresses us again with another fantastic update of one of its treasured classics.



STUART
Double Dragon Neon
It's not perfect, but I've had an insane amount of fun playing through this loving homage to the Eighties.



DAVID
NiGHTS Into Dreams
I always loved the original version and now it's back and looking prettier than ever.

NiGHTS Into Dreams HD

retro GAMER SIZZLER

SEGA CONTINUES TO KEEP THE DREAM ALIVE

INFORMATION

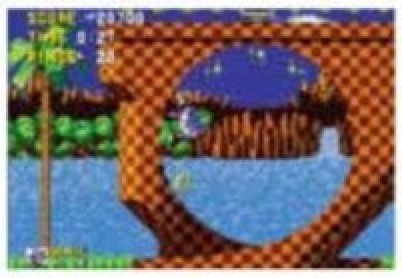
- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PSN, PC
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 800 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SONIC TEAM/ SEGA STUDIO CHINA
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

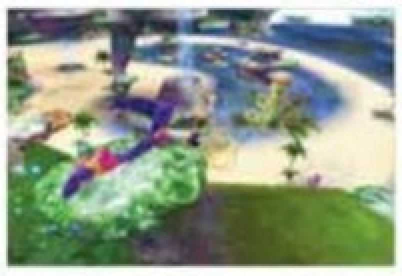
» *NiGHTS Into Dreams* was originally released for Sega Saturn in 1996. Created by Yuji Naka and Sonic Team, it was notable for being released alongside Sega's new 3D controller, which featured an analog stick, a rarity in consoles at the time. A sequel, *NiGHTS: Journey Of Dreams* was released on Wii in 2007.

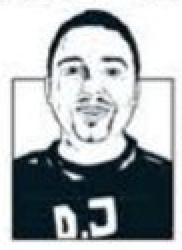
✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (MEGA DRIVE)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
NIGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS (WII)





In some ways this new version of *NiGHTS* shouldn't even exist. The original game may have been lauded as one of the Saturn's most creative titles, but it certainly didn't shift units the same way *Sonic* did. Its enjoyable sequel *NiGHTS: Journey Of Dreams* fared little better on Wii, while Sega's excellent PS2 remake didn't even make its way outside of Japan. Surely that's all the proof needed to realise that *NiGHTS* is a dead franchise?

Sega USA (who handles all of Sega's digital updates) clearly didn't get the memo, as it has unleashed a superb version of *NiGHTS* at a highly attractive price point. Clearly based on the impressive PS2 version, this is a fantastic package that effectively offers you two games for your money, as the original Sega Saturn version is also included.

NiGHTS Into Dreams comes from a time where games expected you to experiment and discover things for yourself, instead of simply leading you by the hand. As a result, those new to the *NiGHTS* universe may simply race through a stage (which is fun in itself) finish with a D ranking then struggle to understand what they're doing wrong.

The crux of *NiGHTS* revolves around chasing high scores, and it's done in a way that offers a surprising amount of strategy. *NiGHTS*' seven stages are called dreams and are shared between two children, Claris and Elliot. At the beginning of each Dream, which is divided into four sub stages and a boss fight, your selected child's Ideya (representing Intelligence, Purity, Hope and Growth) are stolen and you must regain them by overloading the Ideya Capture found on each sub stage.

Ideya are overloaded by collecting 20 chips, which are spread throughout each stage. While it's possible for Claris and Elliot to collect chips themselves, it becomes a lot easier when you control *NiGHTS*, who is gifted with the power of flight. Once 20 chips have been collected all future chips turn gold, which offer even higher bonuses when collected. Grabbing chips, stars, killing enemies and flying through the





» [Xbox 360] The newly remodelled textures look fantastic in HD, allowing *NiGHTS*' exotic looking environments to shine brighter than ever.



» [Xbox 360] If you want to get really high scores you're going to have to master linking levels.







✱GO DEEPER

>> *Christmas Nights* was given away with *Sega Saturn Magazine* in the UK.

>> The PS2 version, on which *NiGHTS HD* is based, was first released in 2008. It only appeared in Japan.

>> *NiGHTS* had made appearances in numerous Sega games, including *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing, Sonic Shuffle* and *Sonic Riders*.

» [Xbox 360] *Christmas NiGHTS* is included, but you'll have to beat the game first in order to play it.



» [Xbox 360] You can quickly collect nearby bonuses by simply looping around them.



PS2 Versus Saturn

If you're a truly die-hard fan you'll quickly notice that there are a number of subtle differences between the two versions of the game. Notable ones include *NiGHTS* speed being a little different, Ideya Captures floating at different heights and that the respawning of chips now happens as soon as you enter an Ideya Capture (you must complete a full lap of the Saturn version before they reappear. Dash panels are also weaker. Many of these differences are far too subtle for most to notice and rarely impact on the strategies you would have used on the original Saturn game. We just felt it was a good idea to mention them.

many orange rings found on each stage will trigger a combo mechanic called linking. Needless to say, the more links you collect in a single chain, the higher your final score and grading will be.

Run out of time — the two-minute limit gets decreased further by getting hit by enemies and bosses — and *NiGHTS* will revert back to Claris or Elliot and the children must then regain access to *NiGHTS* while avoiding a giant alarm clock that continually chases them. Should the alarm clock hit them, the child will awaken and their dream will be over.

Even if you never master *NiGHTS* clever scoring mechanics, it's hard not to be impressed with Sonic Team's imaginative game, mainly because it remains so much fun to play. While it appears to be 3D, *NiGHTS*' action takes place on a 2D plane, with camera angles giving the impression of a vibrant 3D world. It's a clever move on Sega's part as it allows you to simply concentrate on *NiGHTS*' sublime controls. *NiGHTS* was built around the Saturn's new 3D controller and it shows in every small loop and movement you make. It's sounds clichéd, but *NiGHTS* really does give you the impression of flying, so much freedom does it offer, as you gracefully fly around the beautifully constructed worlds.

Lead designer, Takashi Iizuka studied dreams – both in books and the recollections of his staff – while creating *NiGHTS* and it really does show in the final product. A lot of *NiGHTS* really doesn't make sense – one minute you're riding on a toboggan, the next you're bouncing off mattresses, or getting shot through cannons. It somehow all works though, creating a beautifully surreal game that's full of abstract dreamlike imagery. Coupled by an incredibly uplifting soundtrack, *NiGHTS* is an utter joy to play, and even if you never master it, it's hard to not love it.

Sega obviously feels the same way, because this new update has been handled with kid gloves. It's effectively the PS2 version given a high-definition sheen, meaning you get an excellent new version of the game with remodelled 3D polygons, greatly detailed environments and numerous extras that range from a gallery of promotional art to videos, including an insightful reflection from Iizuka about the game's original creation. *Christmas NiGHTS* is also included, although it does lack the ability to play as Sonic and a smattering of other little extras. There are also numerous subtle control differences between the two games, meaning you can't always pull off the same runs you could in the Saturn original, but as a near perfect version is included it becomes something of a moot point. The inclusion of online leaderboards is also a massive bonus, giving high score fans something to continually chase.

NiGHTS Into Dreams is another classic Sega game that has been given the love and respect it deserves. Miss it at your peril.

OPINION



I've played *NiGHTS* every year since it came out simply because it remains unique and has never been bettered. All it lacks is compatibility with modern TVs, and now it has that in this lovingly crafted HD overhaul. It looks stunning, and the online leaderboards are a great addition, encouraging everyone to get to grips with the game and uncover its scoring secrets.

Ashley Day

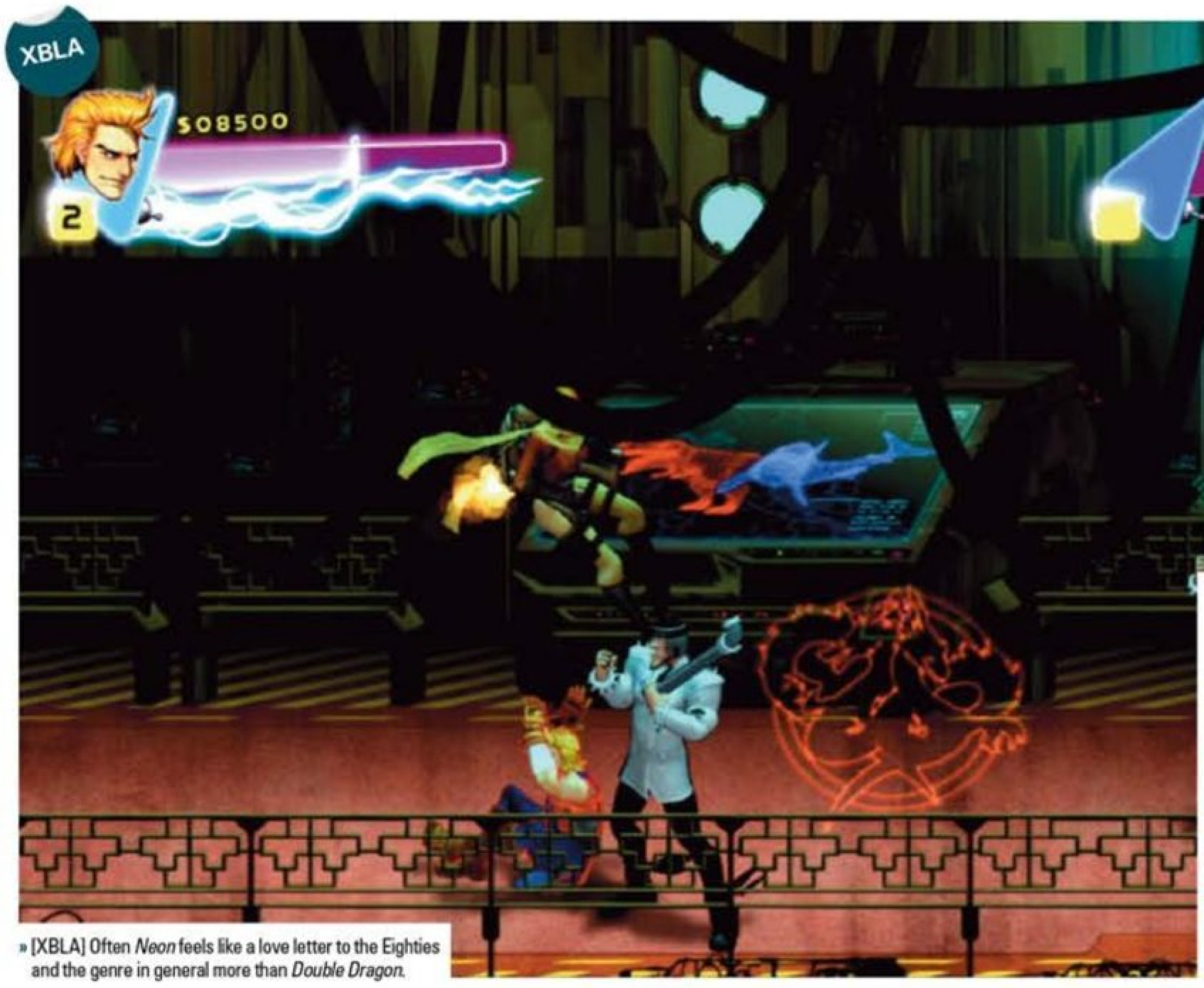
In a nutshell

Sega's game remains an utterly unique experience, which has benefitted greatly from its HD update. It's more proof that when it comes to updating classics no one is doing it better than Sega.

>> Score **96%**

» [Xbox 360] Defeating bosses quickly is key to boosting your multiplier and getting a higher score.





» [XBLA] Often *Neon* feels like a love letter to the Eighties and the genre in general more than *Double Dragon*.

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Double Dragon Neon

>> *Neon* is the first game in the Double Dragon series to use 3D graphics.

>> The soundtrack was composed by Jake Kaufam, co-founder of the game music remix site VGMix.





» [XBLA] For the most part the level design is pretty good, though it does fall into lazy territory – like these lame silhouette bits, which are never a good idea.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 (XBLA)
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3 (PSN)
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 800 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** MAJESCO GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** WAYFORWARD TECHNOLOGIES
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» Released in 1987 by Technos, *Double Dragon* went on to be one of the most defining arcade games of the Eighties, and gained legions of fans thanks to its striking visuals, brutal action and innovative two-player action. It has spawned over nine sequels across multiple formats, and is 25 this year.

★WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

DOUBLE DRAGON ADVANCE (GBA)



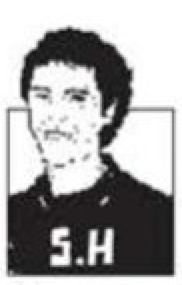
▽ SOMETHING NEW

SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD (XBOX)



DOUBLE DRAGON: NEARLY

Double Dragon Neon



***Double Dragon Neon* certainly captures the surface layer of *Double Dragon*, but it fails to grasp the core and intrinsic makeup of its gameplay. The combat just doesn't feel quite right.**

That you can't elbow strike a thug in the face is forgivable; that you can't grab one by the hair while a mate gives him a good pasting probably really isn't. As such, its action never feels as brutal or as co-op as the earlier games, and never do you get a sense that Abobo, Linda and Williams are feeling their beatings. This isn't helped by the new bright look and whimsical themed stages – which can sometimes make *Neon* feel more like a superior version of *Double Dragon 3* (a comparison made bolder by both games featuring item shops) than a reboot of the original.

That's not to say though that *Neon* isn't a solid fighter. Its presentation is superb, and though the controls and way you select items could be a bit better executed, it's clear that it's been put together with a lot of love and appreciation for the genre – a characteristic of developer WayForward, a studio with a great track record for doing good things with classic franchises (see *Contra 4*, *A Boy And His Blob*).

As well as a superb Eighties-inspired rock guitar soundtrack, there's a nice amount of game to beat (ten and a bit stages, and two difficulties to unlock) as well as a decent array of customisation options. You power up the Lee brothers by collecting cassette tapes that give either a passive or aggressive enhancement – like as a spell attack that summons a giant fire breathing dragon, or an ability that replenishes your energy when successful hits are landed – and can spend cash and mithril crystals on purchasing and levelling them up respectively. *Neon* also has some great nods to Eighties culture. There's a new final boss who looks like Skeletor, a stage with a clear *Star Wars* vibe, and a



helicopter boss that drops ninjas that feels like an homage to the Black Turtle attack chopper in Shinobi.

While *Neon* isn't perfect and we suspect might not quite live up to the expectations of some hardcore *Double Dragon* fans out there, it's still a solid brawler and a highly amusing ride down memory lane.

OPINION



It might not be identical to the *Double Dragon* of old, but it still feels like a natural evolution of the franchise. It's not as brutal as the earlier games, but it's still a highly enjoyable brawler which gives the oft-forgotten genre a much-needed shot in the arm. A fun scrolling fighter and a lovely love letter to the Eighties.

Darran Jones

In a nutshell

Polished, playable and smile raising, *Neon* is yet another solid and respectful release from WayForward even if it doesn't feel schooled in the *Double Dragon* art of fighting.

>> **Score 76%**



XCOM: Enemy Unknown

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PC » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360, PS3 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PUBLISHER:** 2K GAMES » **DEVELOPER:** FIRAXIS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **It's been a** long time coming, but Sid Meier's reimagining of the *X-Com* franchise has been worth the wait. Beautifully balanced and with a gripping story mode, it eases you in gently, before putting you in some challenging battle made all the more pressing due to the permanent loss of your soldiers. In addition to building on the mechanics found in the original *X-Com*, and adding improvements like enhanced cover and an array of new perks for your upgraded soldiers, Meier's game also adds *Civilization* elements and an excellent multiplayer mode that enables two players to face off against each other. Add in intuitive controls that cater specifically to mouse or joypad controls and *XCOM* becomes one of the best strategy games we've played in ages.

>> Score **95%**

Joe Danger 2: The Movie

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3, PC » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 1200 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** HELLO GAMES » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



>> **Hello Games returns** with another enjoyable outing for its lovable stuntman. The focus on *Joe Danger 2* allows Hello Games to not only lovingly spoof some of the biggest films of the Eighties, but also lets them introduce plenty of new vehicles for Joe to play around with. It's worth noting though that the implementation of these new modes of transport can vary wildly though, while difficulty spikes can create an annoying brick wall. The biggest issue we have with *Joe Danger* is that it's now trying to do too much, and as a result it doesn't feel quite as polished or focused as the original game. There's still plenty to enjoy though thanks to slick online leaderboards, a better-balanced scoring system, a great level editor and the fact that it's genuinely fun to play.

>> Score **81%**



Carrier Command: Gaea Mission

» **SYSTEM:** PC » **ALSO ON:** PS3
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **We want to** love *Carrier Command*, because it does a fine job of replicating the experience of the original game. The problem is that it suffers from all sorts of issues that range from slightly irritating to downright annoying. There are some horrendous first-person shooter sections, the game is quite buggy, it takes an age to make any progress initially, and the tutorials are often baffling. But stick with it, because it does all come together and becomes extremely immersive. You will need the patience of a saint, though.

>> Score **60%**



LittleBigPlanet

» **SYSTEM:** PS VITA » **ALSO ON:** N/A
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **Sony's franchise has** always felt a better fit on handheld, with its level editing and oldschool physics invoking the era of the Amiga platformer. This sequel is no different and like the PSP original it boasts clever level design along with a far more satisfying creation mode. Of course the real meat of *LittleBigPlanet* lies in its community and this great Vita version is no different, offering plenty of clever stages, based on new and old games alike. It's all rounded off with some fun retro mini-games and the insane polish that has become a hallmark of the franchise.

>> Score **87%**



Pokémon Black/White Version 2

» **SYSTEM:** NDS » **ALSO ON:** N/A
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> ***Nintendo just keeps*** finding neat ways to reinvigorate the Pokémon franchise. The latest gimmick is the ability to train your Pokémon at the PokéStar Studios and let them star in movies. The Pokémon World Tournament is another new feature, which enables you to battle Gym Masters from previous games, something that is sure to please long-term fans of the franchise. Throw in 300 new Pokémon, along with new locations to explore, and Nintendo has another enjoyable – if unoriginal – hit on its hands.

>> Score **80%**



Super Amazing Wagon Adventure

» **SYSTEM:** PC » **ALSO ON:** XBOX 360
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **If *The Oregon*** *Trail* had been designed by Eugene Jarvis, odds are it would have ended up like this. *SAWA* is a brilliant little indie shooter that sees you controlling a wagon of three intrepid explorers. They'll encounter everything from raging buffalo to dangerous rapids and the random nature of the game ensures it plays differently every time you return to it. Add in some superb chiptune music and some delightfully chunky visuals and you have a highly enjoyable shooter that never gets dull.

>> Score **92%**

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we take a look at the latest classics that have been re-released for a new generation of gamers



DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

Command & Conquer: Ultimate Edition

INFORMATION
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** £24.99
» **Buy it from:** www.origin.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆



***Command & Conquer*'s impact on the real-time strategy genre was immense, redefining the rulebook and setting a template for everything else to follow. Electronic Arts is celebrating the franchise's 17th anniversary by releasing virtually every main game and expansion pack in the franchise, making a grand total of 17 titles.**

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of this compilation is that it does a fantastic job of showing just how diverse the *Command & Conquer* universes actually are. While the core gameplay dynamics remain unchanged, there are more than enough changes to ensure that games feel fresh and challenging. Hell, we're even warming to the unloved child that was *Command & Conquer Generals*, which used first and third-person viewpoints and would go on to become the last game released under Westwood Studios.

One thing that we found disappointing about this expansive compilation is that no work has been done to the older games other than making sure they're compatible with today's systems. This means that the likes of *Command & Conquer* and *Red Alert* have no access to online multiplayer (despite menus suggesting otherwise). Fortunately, online gaming is present in the later titles, but it's a shame as it means that the fun multiplayer spin-off *Sole Survivor*, a multiplayer-only expansion, is no longer available.

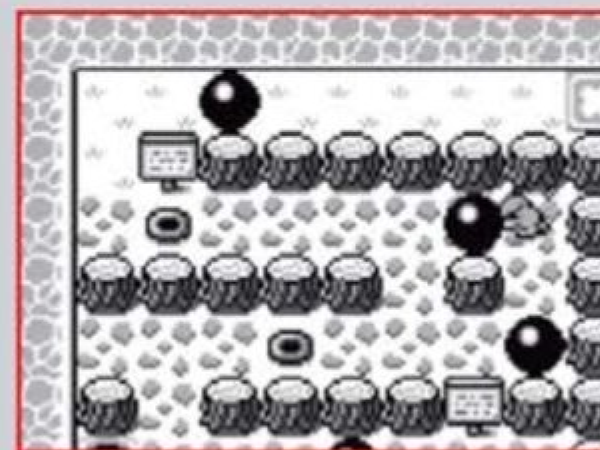
Still, even with this lack of online play there's no escaping the fact that EA's compilation presents tremendous value for money, with a selection of games that range from decent to downright hallmarks of their genre.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



To The Moon

» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** £6.99
» **Buy it from:** www.steampowered.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆
» From the moment you hear *To The Moon*'s delightful music and view its beautiful 16-bit visuals you know you're going to be in for a treat. Full of humour thanks to a pair of spiky protagonists and fuelled by a genuinely touching back story involving the fulfilment of people's dreams, it's a delightful game that effortlessly captures the spirit of old SNES and Mega Drive adventures.



Mole Mania

» **System:** Game Boy
» **Buy it for:** £2.69
» **Buy it from:** Virtual Console 3DS
» **Score:** ★★★★☆
» *Mole Mania* is perfect proof that not everything Miyamoto touches becomes a commercial success. This in itself is something of a shame, as *Mole Mania* is a great puzzle game that rarely gets the attention it deserves. *Mole Mania*'s gameplay is notable because the puzzle-like levels must be solved by constantly burrowing around the surface of the game world. Well suited to gaming on the go.



Inquisitor

» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** $14.99
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★☆☆☆
» There are a lot of things we love about *Inquisitor*. The story is genuinely excellent with plenty of clever twists and turns; the gameplay mechanics (which resolve around interrogation) are novel, and it looks like *Diablo* crossed with *Baldur's Gate*. It's such a pity then that *Inquisitor* is hampered by unintuitive gameplay, clunky controls and a baffling user-interface. A nice idea that's been let down by poor presentation.



Sonic Adventure 2

» **System:** Dreamcast
» **Buy it for:** 800 Points
» **Buy it from:** Xbox Live/PSN
» **Score:** ★★★★☆
» We'll never forgive *Sonic Adventure 2* for unleashing Shadow upon the world, but there's no denying that the core gameplay holds up very well. It's a far stronger offering than *Sonic Adventure* thanks to better level design, a less twitchy (but far from perfect) camera and a lot more variety in its gameplay. Like *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, it's another slick adaptation that comes with a bargain pricepoint.

▾ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

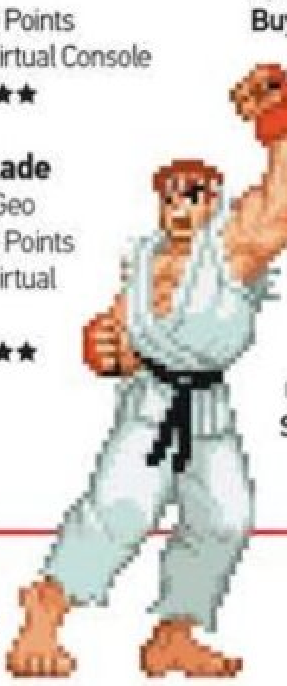
It's another slow month, so we're revisiting some of the Virtual Console's best one-on-one fighting games

IK+
System: C64
Buy it for: 500 Points
Buy it from: Virtual Console
Score: ★★★★★

The King Of Fighter 96
System: Neo Geo
Buy it for: 900 Points
Buy it from: Virtual Console
Score: ★★★★★

The Last Blade
System: Neo Geo
Buy it for: 900 Points
Buy it from: Virtual Console
Score: ★★★★★

Street Fighter Alpha 2
System: SNES
Buy it for: 800 Points
Buy it from: Virtual Console
Score: ★★★★☆



▾ PSN

Finally, it's possible to play PSone games on our shiny Vitas. Here's what we're currently playing

Final Fantasy VIII
System: PSone
Buy it for: £7.99
Buy it from: PSN
Score: ★★★★★

Metal Gear Solid
System: PSone
Buy it for: £7.99
Buy it from: PSN
Score: ★★★★★

Bishi Bashi Special
System: PSone
Buy it for: £3.49
Buy it from: PSN
Score: ★★★★★

Resident Evil 2
System: PSone
Buy it for: £7.99
Buy it from: PSN
Score: ★★★★★



▾ PC SERVICES

There's been a range of interesting stuff on PC this month, including *La Mulana* and *Intrusion 2*, a fun physics-based run-and-gun

Intrusion 2
System: PC
Buy it for: £6.49
Buy it from: www.steampowered.com
Score: ★★★☆☆

La Mulana
System: PC
Buy it for: $14.99
Buy it from: www.gog.com
Score: ★★★★☆

Symphony
System: PC
Buy it for: £6.99
Buy it from: www.steampowered.com
Score: ★★★☆☆

Carmageddon Max Pack
System: PC
Buy it for: $9.99
Buy it from: www.gog.com
Score: ★★★☆☆



>> The scene's latest news and reviews



I've been thinking about "masocore" – a portmanteau of masochism and hardcore – games like Sqrxz and Mighty Jill Off recently, titles where the designer is generous with lives but tortures the player by making them repeat tasks until perfected. What do we as players enjoy about these games? Do we love hard-earned reward or is it something more disturbing...?



FORMAT: OCS/ECS AMIGA
DEVELOPER: RETRO GURU
LINK: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/SQR-AMIGA MAGE-VIDEOPAC
RELEASE: 2012
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO PRONOUNCE IT EITHER!

SQRXZ

It was a lovely, sunny day and Sqrxz had spent most of it wandering around the countryside, admiring the local scenery and drinking in the atmosphere. In fact he became so caught up with the moment that it wasn't until darkness started to fall and his thoughts turned to home that the poor chap realised that he'd lost all manner of things during his meanderings. If that wasn't bad enough, there are woodland creatures beginning to stir as night rolls in that don't exactly look like they'll be happy to help Sqrxz in his search for the missing goodies.

This game started life running on DOS and early iterations of Windows back in 1996 and the remade version has since been converted to over a dozen platforms including the Dreamcast, Pandora and supercharged Amigas running MorphOS or OS4. But this newest iteration, which was released at the Buenzli demoscene party where it won the game development competition, takes things back to basics, converting what the developers were already calling an Amiga-styled game to actually run on a stock Amiga 500 with a megabyte of RAM.

The levels are push-scrolled from right to left and that movement can't be reversed so missing an all-important item makes the stage literally impossible to complete, at which point using the exit will, like the pause menu's "suicide" option or dying, send Sqrxz back to the start – or if he's lucky, a previously activated check point – to try again. Levels need to be completed within the time limit and, whilst Sqrxz is



» [Amiga] Let's see you climb after me.

underwater, the air meter will also decrease until he drowns. While it might look and sound cute throughout, *Sqrxz* really isn't a game for the faint hearted.

The original developers deliberately wanted it to have a punishing difficulty level and, although there have been some tweaks and cosmetic upgrades during the subsequent processes of remaking and porting, it hasn't mellowed with age. It plays some truly dirty tricks on the player almost as soon as the tutorial is completed; *Rick Dangerous*-style spike traps are placed to block off what would otherwise be quicker routes through the stage and players need to know where to dash forwards to trigger a portcullis and trap an enemy that otherwise becomes an impassable hazard. To counterbalance things, extra lives are dished out like sweets – with some conveniently placed just before a particularly nasty part of the map – and, along with infinite continues, each stage has a password to allow players to jump in at it after re-loading the game from scratch.

But this is still one of those games that wants to have players screaming at their screens, almost slinging the joystick across the room in sheer frustration and storming off to mutter darkly at anybody who'll listen... only to return ten minutes later for another go, like the recent *Spelunky*. And, despite that significant frustration factor, we found it enjoyable to go head-to-head against the evil minds behind the levels and ever so occasionally defeat them.

80%



» [Amiga] There's a spike trap here... somewhere.



» [Amiga] Like a snowball down a mountain.



» [Amiga] Out-thinking the local wildlife.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

PENGUINO

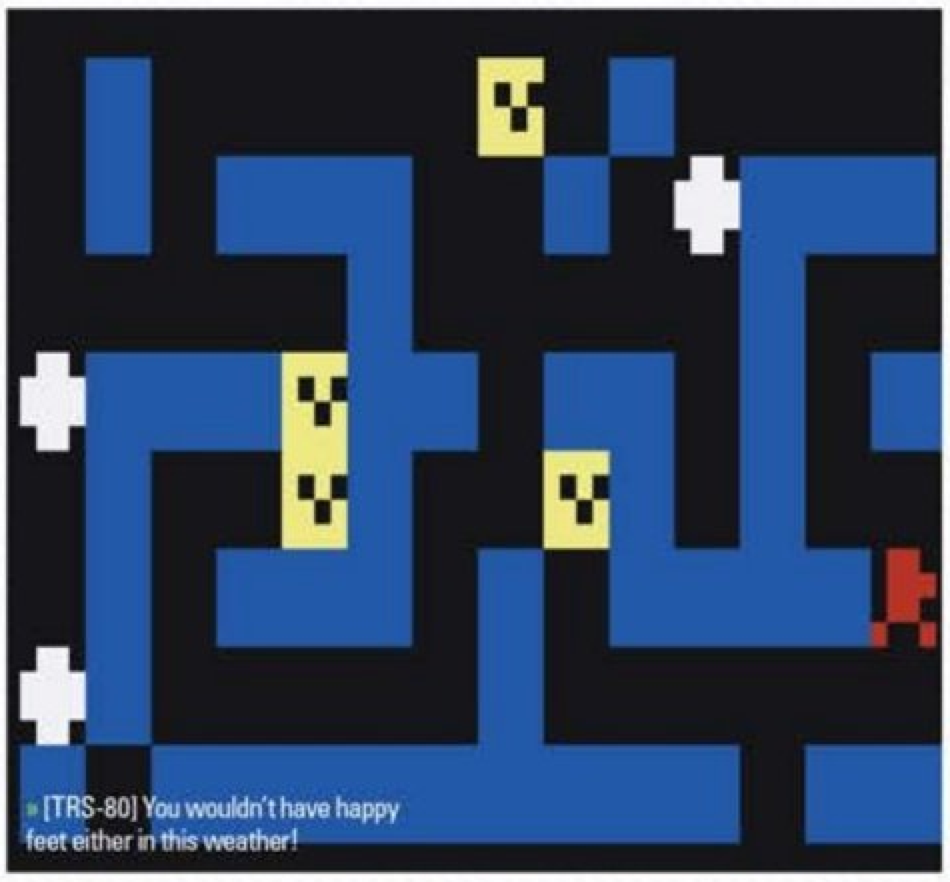
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** TANDY TRS-80 MC-10 » **DEVELOPER:** JIM GERRIE
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/PENGUINO-TRS80 » **PRICE:** FREE

Penguino has been charged with gathering penguin eggs, a relatively simple task that has been made more difficult by the arrival of Snow Bees who apparently have nothing better to do than p-p-pester a penguin. Fortunately, the eggs have been deposited in a series of corridors constructed from huge blocks of ice, and these walls form barriers that both Penguino and the Snow Bees must manoeuvre around. Penguino can also send blocks sliding across open spaces in the play area and squashing every enemy on a stage in this manner will take him on to the next.

Whilst this *Pengo* clone has some speed issues due to being written in BASIC, and a reliance on some rather chunky graphics, it's still surprisingly playable and smashing an ice cube through a group of Snow Bees feels remarkably satisfying.

73%



» [TRS-80] You wouldn't have happy feet either in this weather!

MOLE RAT

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

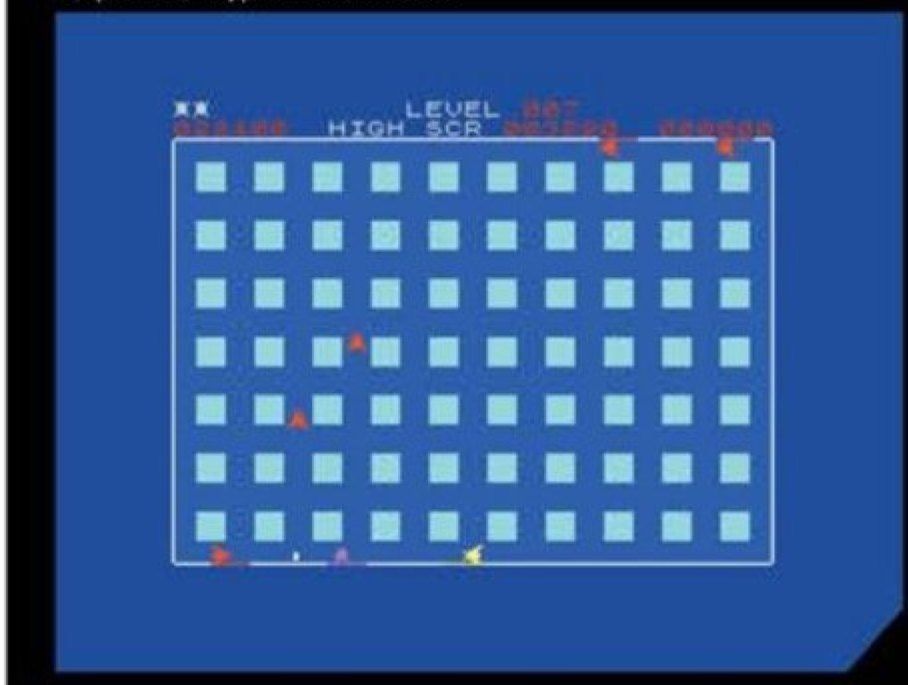
» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** STONECHAT PRODUCTIONS
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/MOLE-RAT-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE

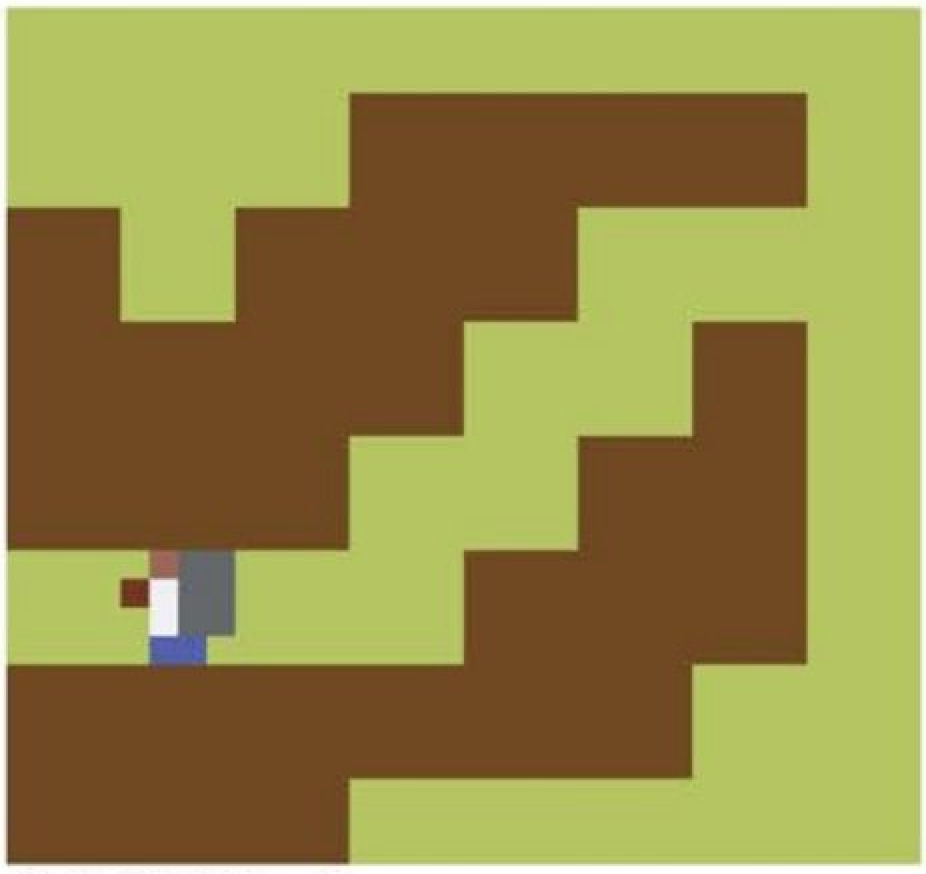
The titular Mole Rat's home has been invaded by a swarm of moths and in order to recover his territory he'll need to blast them with... whatever it is moles carry around for killing insects. Once the level begins, he only slows down when reversing direction and never stops entirely, since he always fires forwards, so lining up a clear shot without dying will take practise.

Developer Dave Hughes decided to deliberately keep things simple with *Mole Rat* and it has some similarities with a couple of early Eighties game designs – in particular the coin-op *Targ* which it also resembles visually – and that extends to the simplicity of the in-game action. *Mole Rat* is all about playing on instinct and has a "take no prisoners" mentality as regards difficulty levels. So, while for some players there's only limited replay value since nothing is added to the mix after the first stage, others will enjoy losing themselves in the uncomplicated kill or be killed action.

82%

» [Spectrum] Trapped like a (mole) rat.





» [Atari Lynx] Anybody home…?

TINY LYNX ADVENTURE

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** SUPER NES » **DEVELOPER:** ALEKMAUL
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/MAZEZAM-SNES » **PRICE:** FREE

The dastardly Bad Guy is in need of defeating and Good Guy, the only other person in this particular part of The World, has been sent to sort him out. But evem getting to Bad Guy is going to take a lot of exploration. Not only that, but Good Guy will also need to locate a pair of flippers to swim through otherwise impassable lakes, search the desert for a key to open the ominous-sounding Black Castle and, unless the protective crown and deadly weapon are also retrieved, trying to take on Bad Guy will automatically prove fatal for our hero.

The blocky graphics and non-existent sound – both due to the original game being written for an online 6502 emulator - really don't do the Lynx system any justice at all, but somehow, even though the gameplay is limited to just exploring and collecting the occasional object, it's still an entertaining undertaking.

We'd really like to see an improved version of this game which adds some enemies to fight, treasures to discover and audiovisuals that take proper advantage of the hardware available.

80%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Atari 8-bit] Scrolling shooter action from ABBUC 2012.

>> PLAYED ATARI TODAY?

German user group ABBUC's annual software contest for 2012 has already closed for entries and by the time this goes to print, the results and games should be available. As with previous years there are some enew Atari 8-bit games coming out including a conversion of Spectrum puzzler *MazezaM* by xxl and ABBUC stalwart Matosimi's great looking version of the Flash game *Continuity* at www.abbuc.de



» [ZX81] Clive Junior, meet stick.

>> MONOCOLOUR LOVE

After releasing *Mage*, Revival Studios have gone even more oldschool with two newly-minted ZX81 games. *Mayhem* is a fast-paced single screen action game where Clive Junior must collect the scattered parts of his latest invention while *Avalanche* involves matching symbols between the player and a falling object before it can be shot. Both can be purchased/downloaded with online functionality disabled for free at www.revival-studios.com



» [NES] A game of cat and mouse.

>> ON THE NES WITH A ROCKET

www.kikstart.eu/chu-chu-nes will whisk visitors to part of developer Dwedit's website where he's posted screenshots and a playable alpha test preview of *Chu Chu Rocket* converted to the NES – a game he's already had a to at reproducing on the Texas TI-83 calculator previously! The game engine itself is apparently complete, and it's possible to play through the puzzle mode.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> YIPPEE-KI-YAY, KEMO SABE

XBLIG has seen quite a few dungeon-crawling games lately and *Dungeon Diehard* is, unsurprisingly, another addition to that list. The lucky – or possibly unlucky – few chosen to enter the dungeons will find themselves facing many dangers but at the same time they'll get a chance to gather all manner of riches, weaponry and even a magical chest that will follow them around during play. The dungeons are generated randomly at the start of a game, so each quest is different. Adventure lovers can explore further over at www.kikstart.eu/diehard-dungeon-xblig



>> THINGS MAY BE A LITTLE HARD NOW

Splodge is a puzzle-based platformer with a twist; the titular blob must rescue his beloved from a castle by jumping from platform to platform, but he can only stand on neutral grey stones or ones that match his current colour. Pressing X will toggle him between hues and, as the game progresses, these changes will need to be made mid jump. www.kikstart.eu/splodge-xblig goes to the XBLIG shop page for *Splodge*.



FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at Evoland.

EVOLAND IS THE STORY OF ROLEPLAYING GAMES ACTUALLY TOLD THROUGH AN RPG. THE ADVENTURE STARTS WITH THE PLAYER RENDERED IN FOUR COLOURS AND ONLY MOVING RIGHT, WITH UPGRADES INCLUDING FREE MOVEMENT, SCROLLING, IMPROVED COLOUR DEPTH, NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS AND QUESTS TO BE FOUND IN THE CHESTS AROUND THE PLAY AREA. WWW.KIKSTART.EU/EVOLAND-FLASH

MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



DIAMOND CHALLE

» DOWNLOAD: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/DIAMOND-CHALLE-XBLIG

J.K

Anybody who has played *Boulder Dash* should feel immediately at home with *Diamond Challe* because it's a pretty straight clone of First Star's Atari 8-bit classic. Granted, the graphics have been given a lick of cartoon styled paint and a couple of interesting new elements have been added to the *Boulder Dash* formula such as the exploding boulders, but the game itself still has a very similar feel.

Counting all of the one and two player stages and the simplified ones provided as tutorials, there are over forty to work through and, once those have been mastered, there's also a built-in construction kit which can be used to create new challenges along with the option of sharing those creations with fellow *Diamond Challe* players.

FUNKY BALLS

» DOWNLOAD: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/FUNKY-BALLS-XBLIG

J.K

The Funky Balls are large spheres which, when an avatar is balanced on top of them, can be guided; there are ten balls to gather in total and each has its own properties, some are slow with a powerful jump, others move much faster but spend less time in the air and unlocking them is done by earning experience points during play.

The levels themselves are a series of platforms, ramps, bumpers and pipes which hover in orbit and completing one is simply a matter of selecting a ball for it and getting from the starting point to its exit… but to really rack up those experience points it's necessary to finish quickly and collect a quota of gems and monkey-themed items along the way.



» [Xbox 360] And we do so love gems.

SNOPS ATTACK! ZOMBIE DEFENSE

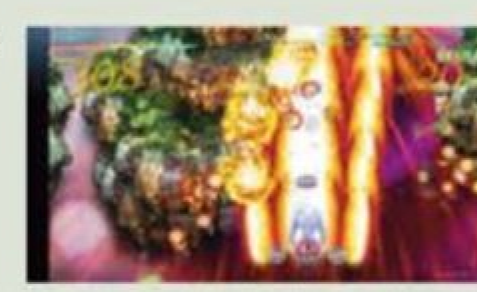
» DOWNLOAD: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/SNOPS-ATTACK-XBLIG

J.K

Take to the skies as loveable canine hero Snops to defend untold worlds from what appears to be a mostly cat-driven and surprisingly airborne zombie apocalypse.

There are huge numbers of the undead that need to be dealt with, and by 'dealt with' we mean 'kill violently', so Snops has been armed with a cool spaceship with a couple of powerful weapons that can be toggled with the X button and a small stock of smart bombs on B for emergencies, but he'll still need to be wary of his foes since they're pretty trigger happy as well.

Everything in *Snops Attack* is over-the-top from the ridiculous zombie cats groaning balefully as they're blasted to oblivion to the spinning Easter Island heads and the huge, brightly coloured sprays of bullets from nasties and player alike.



And despite the bizarre storyline, equally weird attackers and over the top pyrotechnics, *Snops Attack* takes itself pretty seriously as a shoot-'em-up, falling very squarely into the bullet hell category; this means that there'll be hundreds if not thousands of enemy projectiles to avoid and a small fatal collision area on Snops' craft which also has some shielding so a single shot won't be fatal.

The two priorities are staying in one piece and racking up as big a score as possible in the process by blasting things, collecting items left behind and keeping the two combo counters active. It's a frantic, colourful offering that those with a penchant for bullets should check out.



» [Xbox 360] Looks like a friendly sort of chap.



» [Xbox 360] Hyper Attack… Sounds nice and relaxing.

HOMEBREW HEROES



JAMIE ALVIS IS JUST IN THE PROCESS OF PUTTING THE FINAL TOUCHES TO THE FIRST RELEASE FOR HIS C64 PUBLISHING HOUSE FLIMSOFT – WWW.FLIMSOFT.CO.UK – SO WE TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND OUT WHAT'S INVOLVED IN GETTING A GAME BOXED UP AND AVAILABLE FOR SALE

Q&A

What was it that originally got you thinking about publishing new C64 games?
After a fourteen/fifteen year break from using a Commodore 64 I decided to buy another a few years back – nostalgia more than anything. I was amazed to discover a vast community on a global scale. I eventually discovered Psytronik and was again astonished that coders were still releasing games. At the time of discovering, *Knight 'N' Grail* was on the verge of being released – this game brought back my true love of Commodore 64.

I originally set out to re-release older CP Verlag titles such as *Bobix* but copyright was a problem even having talked to the original coders behind that game. So I would say that Psytronik was a massive inspiration behind Flimsoft. I also see the Commodore 64 world in recent years as having a 'punk' ethic of DIY – there is no standard, which is always a bonus, there's creativity and being experimental makes things fun.

How have you gone about finding games to publish?
The early stages of finding ways for people to submit were at times painful. As a user of various Commodore 64 forums, I found that most people would mock me. I had a concrete idea and opened threads which asking coders to submit their games. Many people 'strung' me along and gave me unnecessary replies which just escalated into wider arguments between forum users. At one point I had a reply from Tomi Malinen who seemed genuinely interested with Flimsoft. He initially suggested an *Indiana Jones*-style game that he had worked on several years prior. Due to the content we agreed it wouldn't be a wise idea (Harrison Ford might not have liked it). So I looked through his CSDb listing and came across *Alien Bash* which I suggested would make an ideal debut release.

Flimsoft also featured in *Commodore Free* (issue 63) where I was vocal about coders submitting games to Flimsoft. It also needs to be put into clear perspective that Flimsoft is still a new software house with much more to come. I would like to say thanks to Nigel Parker of *CF* for being there for me when times got hard. Also thanks to Micro Mart for mentioning me.

And what is coming next from Flimsoft?
I really have no idea what the future holds. I am hoping to engage in future work with Tomi though. I also have another coder in the works. I remain optimistic that Flimsoft has a bright future ahead and it is only early days. I welcome platform games with open arms. Anything though will be considered by Flimsoft so if you have something yourself, don't hesitate to get on touch!

Are you planning to stick to the C64 or would you consider other platforms?
I think in the future we might just open the gates to other Commodore 8-bit computers too. So if you have written for any Commodore 8-bit platforms, do get in touch with us.

Where did the name Flimsoft originally come from?
Flimsoft is a tribute to my all-time favourite game *Flimbo's Quest*. Merge that with 'software' and we have a funky name.

Finally, is there any advice you can give to others who might be considering something similar?
Be prepared to be bombarded with criticism. Be prepared to spend hours and hours on Photoshop. Also employ someone you can trust to maintain your website, in my case my good friend Alex Mullholland attends to it.



» [C64] *Alien Bash 2*'s standard and limited edition packaging.



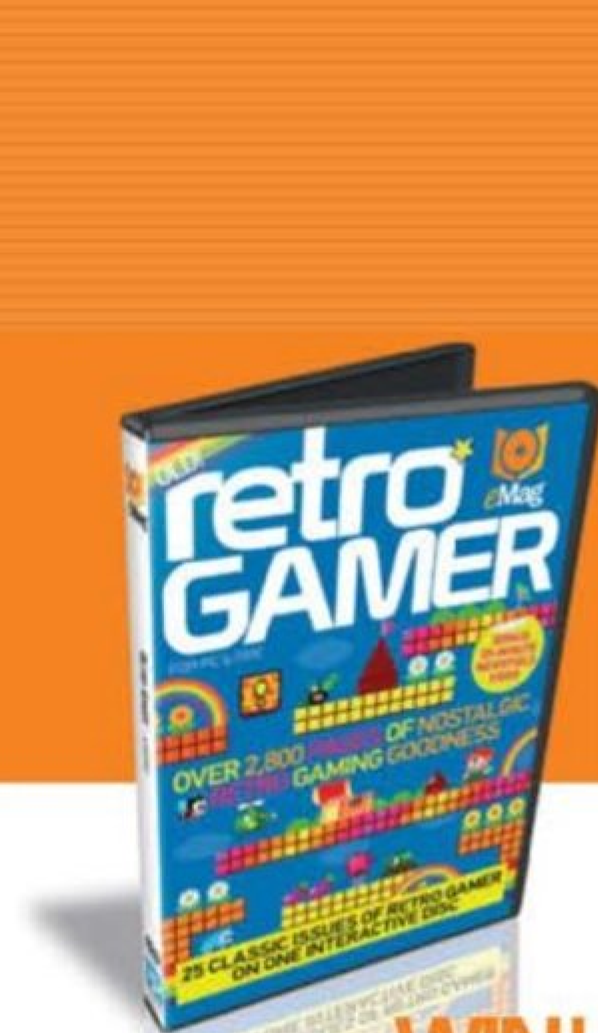
» [C64] Then to my favourite hobby.



» [C64] Hold still while I'm shooting at you!

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

STAR LETTER

THE HONEYMOONERS

Hi there,

My name is Robert Leonard and I'm an avid reader and American subscriber (takes a few extra days for each issue to cross the pond) of **Retro Gamer**. Greece is a lot closer to your offices than mine, but I wanted to take an action shot of me reading your latest issue while everyone else around me was gawking at the Acropolis ruins. My newly-wed wife took this picture and was a good sport to take a moment out of our honeymoon for the photo shoot.

As always, keep up the good work. Cheers!

Rob



Anyone who risks their marriage to promote Retro Gamer is certainly all right in our book. You've earned yourself an eMag. Wrap it up and give it to your wife on your first anniversary. She'll love it.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What was your favourite Ultimate game?

Hiro
Being a commodorist, I'll go with *The Staff Of Karnath*. Hard as nails, some obscure puzzles (not uncommon with Ultimate…), but great challenge and atmosphere.

Confessor
I spent hours on *Atic Atac*, but the first thing that springs on my mind right now is the coloured beauty that was *Pssst!*

Sputryk
How can you possibly ask such a question? It's like choosing your favourite child.

Rygarman
COOKIE! My sister and I bought a Spectrum game each back in the day, and they both, completely by chance, happened to be Ultimate games on silver label. I bought *Pssst!* and she bought *Cookie*… I loved them both, but even now *Cookie* gets me hooked. So simple, so original, still a challenge, and so much joystick-waggling fun!

khisanth
Easy. *Knight Lore* on the mighty Amstrad. The first Ultimate game I had and the atmosphere of the game hooked me.

paranoid marvin
The best thing about Ultimate games were the cool cardboard boxes, with ace cover art and mysterious instructions.

sirclive1
I love them all, but the one that I love the most is *Lunar Jetman*. It's hard as nails, but persevere and you get rewarded with one of the finest games of all time.

PaulEMoz
I was a Commodore 64 owner, but Ultimate and the Spectrum went hand in hand. Although *Jetpac* is my favourite and a game I still play often today, I would have to say that *Knight Lore* blew me away like nothing else had at the time. It felt truly revolutionary, and that you could truly inhabit other worlds on your home computer.

skinny
While I loved *Jetpac* (it just went on and on and on!) probably *Atic Atac*. Fantastic smooth animation and having different secret passages for each character gave it real longevity and a feeling of 'three games in one'.

Naitch
Sabre Wulf was the first Ultimate game I played, followed of course by *Knight Lore* and *Atic Atac* which both inspired the TV show *Knightmare*!

Mire Mare
Jetpac on the Spectrum. A superb shooter that seamlessly added a collect-'em-up element to the mix. High score chasing at its ZX finest.

Hitman_HalStep
Jetpac – I've always had that "patting your head and rubbing your stomach" sensation playing it because of the physics and it still panics me playing it to this day.

Antiriad2097
If you'd asked me back in the day I'd have said *Knight Lore*, but in retrospect *Jetpac* is the true representation of playability alongside high quality graphics, the mix that made them truly ultimate games.

WHERE IS THE LOVE?

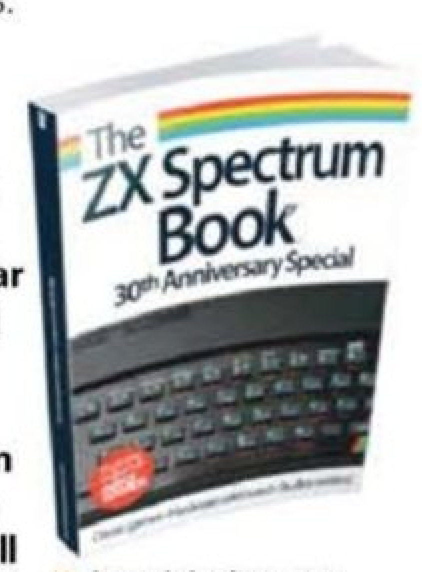
Dear Retro Gamer,

I recently read through your bookazine that celebrated the anniversary of the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64. I was wondering if you have any similar plans to put a bookazine together for the Amstrad CPC 464 in this way?

It's going to be 30 years old in 2014, and it deserves every bit as much coverage as the other 8-bit systems.

James Pitt

Thanks for your interest, James. The Amstrad doesn't seem to be as popular as the Spectrum and Commodore 64, so we'd be unlikely to run an entire book on it. But we'll certainly consider it;there's still a while to go before its anniversary.

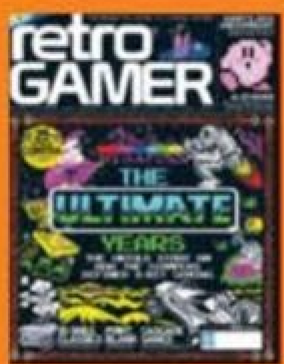


» James is hoping to see an Amstrad bookazine in 2014.

ON THE BALL

Dear Retro Gamer,

I've been reading your magazine for about six months now. I was wondering if you [or one of your readers] might be able to help me in identifying an old game for the PC [an perhaps also for other systems, but I'm not sure]. It was a very early football-manager game. You had a small



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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

* THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY. . . This issue's covers that nearly happened



DARRAN

This is quite possibly the pinkest cover I've ever seen. It was a bold, interesting cover, but as Nintendo itself had decided not to cover the franchise in the UK – the collection goes unreleased in Europe – we eventually settled for something else.



STUART

Sometimes ideas work better in your head than on paper. We wanted this to be a compilation of all the cool Mode 7 effects that we used to remember from back in the day. The end result was a complete mess, however, and while we tried various things, we just couldn't get it to work in any meaningful way.





squad of about 13 players. I think that it was before the Premier League was established, so the league structure was division 1-4. It was probably released in the late Eighties or very early Nineties. A distinctive point of the game was that there was a physio that you could ask for comments; he would always say something funny, and I still remember some of them. He said, "Give up smoking tea leaves!" and "A holiday in [Leeds/Barnsley/Grimsby/ insert rough town] would be nice." I first played the game when it was included in a disc from PC World of various football games. In the early days of AOL, I found it on the shareware section.

I've tried several Google searches, but cannot find anything. It is difficult to search for when the internet is full of so many discussions on football. I'd be extremely grateful for any help.

Ed Aveyard



>> [PS3] We've no idea what football game Ed is seeking. We're pretty sure it's not FIFA.

Unfortunately, Ed, this isn't something we can help you with, as our knowledge of football games is pretty poor to say the least. Hopefully one of our readers will know the game you're on about.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The GMAs

This year, like every previous year, Retro Gamer was up for best magazine at the Games Media Awards in London. This year, like every other year Stuart and Darran pretended not to care about the awards, while secretly caring about it a great deal. Unfortunately, we once again lost out to *Edge*, but we'll get them next year.

HIGH SEAS GAMING

Dear Retro Gamer,

There are some areas of retro gaming about which we do not speak. Sure, your brilliant mag touches on them from time to time, but never (in my experience of reading) for more than a fleeting mention.

I speak about patches, emulation, abandonware, etc. How do I apply a patch to a game, like the recent one you mentioned for the English-language version of *Mother 3*? I'm guessing not with sticky-tape.

Am I legally allowed to download ROMs of old Mega Drive games to play on my Blaze handheld? The SD card slot is clearly the USP of the product, but even the manufacturer plays dumb to its true purpose. And how does one convert a physical cartridge into a digital ROM in the first place?

And emulation… The whole area is very murky to me. What is it exactly, and how does it work? What kit do I need? What systems can I emulate and what systems can I use to play the emulated games? So how about an honest and impartial article giving some clear answers to these gaming grey areas? Because if your magazine can't cover them objectively, who can?

With thanks,

Tim



>> [Mega Drive] Tim wants more information on emulation and piracy. We'll look into it.

You're right, Tim, it is a very grey area, and its only getting greyer as more and more publishers are realising the worth of the back catalogues. But you've no more right to download a copy of *Sonic The Hedgehog* than you do the latest Coldplay album or *Batman* film.

Of course many will argue that downloading old games is okay, because if you bought it online the original developer/publisher wouldn't benefit from the sale anyway, but it's a pretty flaky argument. Some feel it's fine if you bought the original game back in the day. In fact, it's far too big a topic too neatly sew up here, so we'll look at putting a proper feature together within these very pages.

retro GAMER

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A LEGEND PASSES

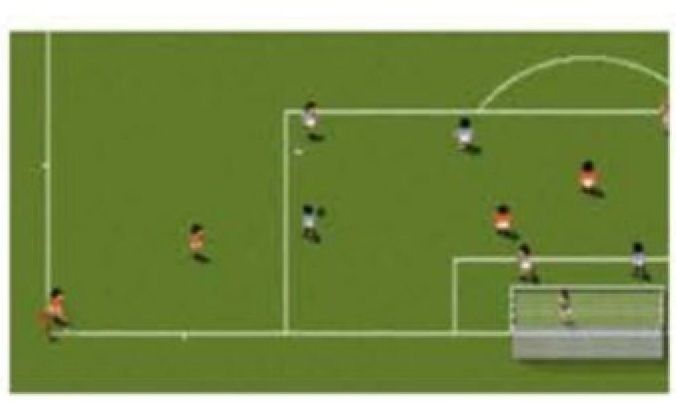


We speak to the friends and peers of the legendary Spectrum coder and examine his lasting impact on videogames

Also inside

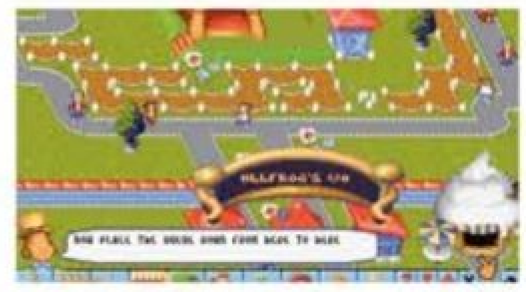
Nintendo Land
■ Discover how Nintendo is using 12 classic franchises to put the fun into the Wii U





Sensible World Of Soccer
■ Jon Hare looks back at his classic Amiga hit and explains to **Retro Gamer** how he created a football masterpiece

Bullfrog
■ As it celebrates its 25th anniversary, Peter Molyneux and other Bullfrog luminaries look back at the company's impressive legacy



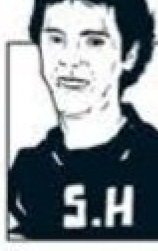


Jeff Minter
■ The popular 8-bit coder discusses his last thirty years in the software industry and what he's up to now

Risky Woods

A DINAMIC GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

» RETROREVIVAL



» MEGA DRIVE
» DINAMIC SOFTWARE
» 1992

***Risky Woods* is a game I remember picking up for the Mega Drive purely due to its cheap price. With its discounted price tag staring dejectedly back at me, I weighed up the small financial risk in my head and decided it was probably worth taking a punt on.**

As well as the paltry price, I remember two things about *Risky Woods*. A) it was challenging and b) it reminded me of the Psygnosis or Bitmap Bros version of *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. The visuals had that pretty but glum Amiga look, and its gameplay involved running around some detail-rich stages, opening up treasure chests, jumping on moving platforms, slaughtering enemies with an array of different weapons and unlocking gates via a neat but repetitive memory puzzle.

But neither Psygnosis nor the Bitmaps had any connection to it. In fact, I later discovered that *Risky Woods* was the final game from Dinamic Software, the Spanish software house responsible for some of the most sumptuous-looking games on 8-bit micros (*Game Over, Army Moves*). *Risky Woods* is pretty much your typical side-scrolling action platformer. You make your way from left to right, blasting a relentless horde of demonic and prehistoric enemies with projectile weapons while freeing a requisite number of monks from their stone statue state to progress.

The gameplay is overseen by a tight time limit and many of the pick-ups and objectives use precious time. One item will send your character backwards in the level by a few screens (which can sometimes be necessary for collecting the key needed to unlock the doors), while regenerating health causes your character to take a power nap.

Another interesting thing about *Risky Woods* is that the Mega Drive port differs to the computer versions. As well as changing the look of the main character, it did away with the item shops and instead forced you to spend the money you earned on the mission on damage-reducing armour.

Risky Woods may not have set the console world alight on its release, but it is a challenging and well presented action platformer that's worth picking up. *







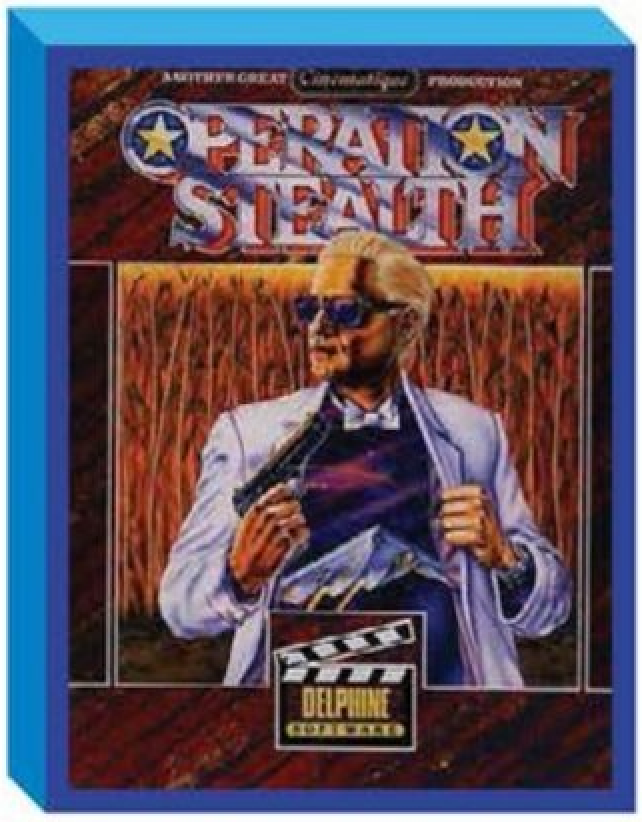





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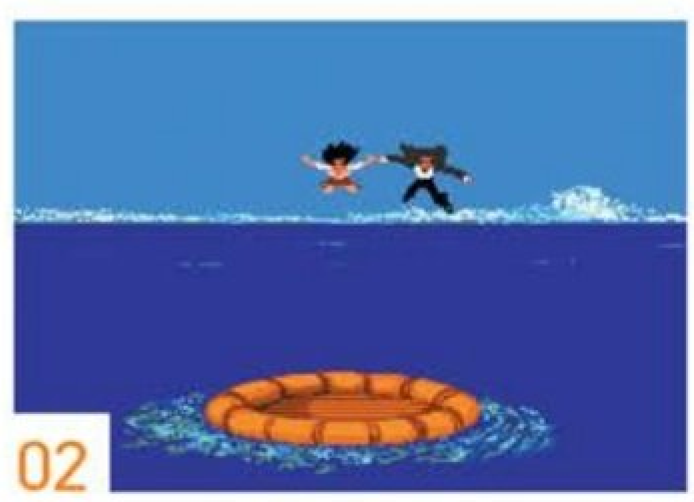
OPERATION STEALTH

» This point-and-click adventure by Delphine Software was inspired by the world's most famous British spy. Released in the US with the official Bond licence attached, whether you're playing dressed as James Bond or the less well-known John Glames, Operation Stealth's mission remains the same: thwart the evil Dr Why



01

» As Glames and his girl Julia hang out beneath Dr Why's helicopter, just getting to know each other, the quick-thinking super spy pulls out an unlikely object and attaches it to the bomb, which is armed and ready for release.



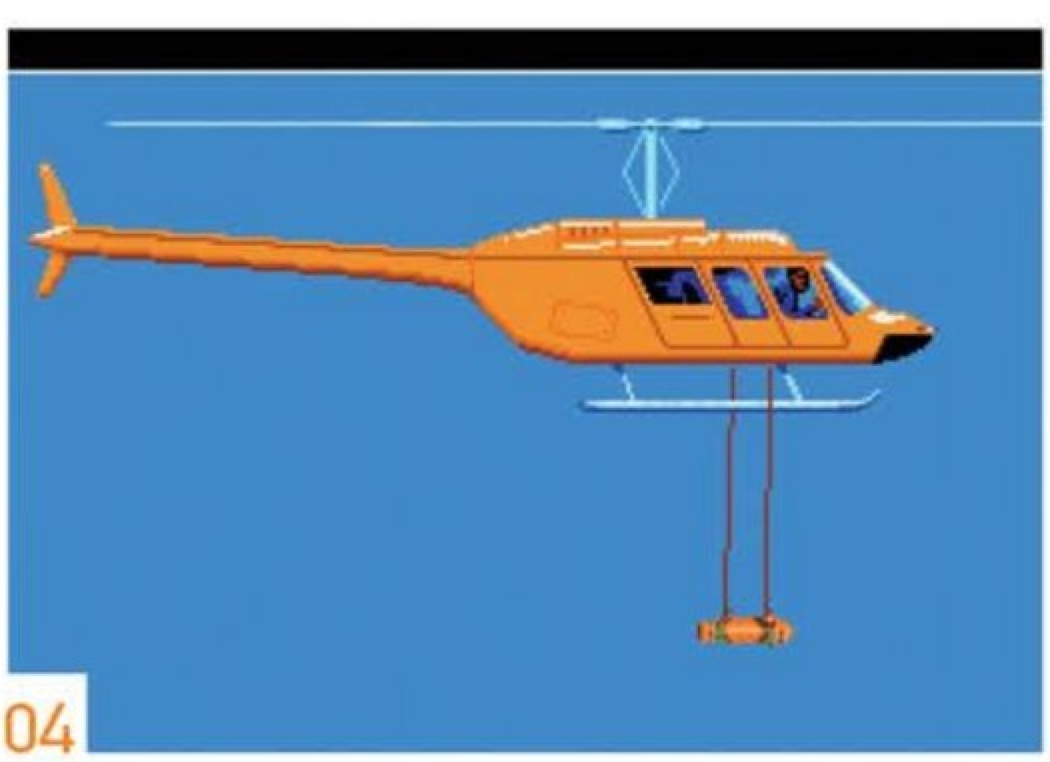
02

» The couple then release their grip and freefall towards the sea. Thankfully, Glames, who has prepared well for his mission, has a lifeboat stuffed in his top pocket. Pulling the cord, it inflates to provide them with a soft, dry landing.



03

» The master villain still thinks he has an assured way to thwart the spy though. He releases the bomb, expecting it to obliterate Glames and Julia. Well, this *would* be the case, were it not for one small thing…



04

» The bomb is released from the chopper, but due to rubber band physics, it bungees down and returns from whence it came. It's best not to question the doubtfulness of a bomb drop being scuppered by a piece of stationary equipment.



05

» With the world safe, Glames receives a hero's parade thrown by the now liberated people of Santa Paruga. Receiving a medal and a national holiday in his name, all that's left is for him to kiss the girl and then dump her before his next spy mission.


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